My Instant Death Ability Is So Overpowered, No One in This Other World Stands a Chance Against Me!

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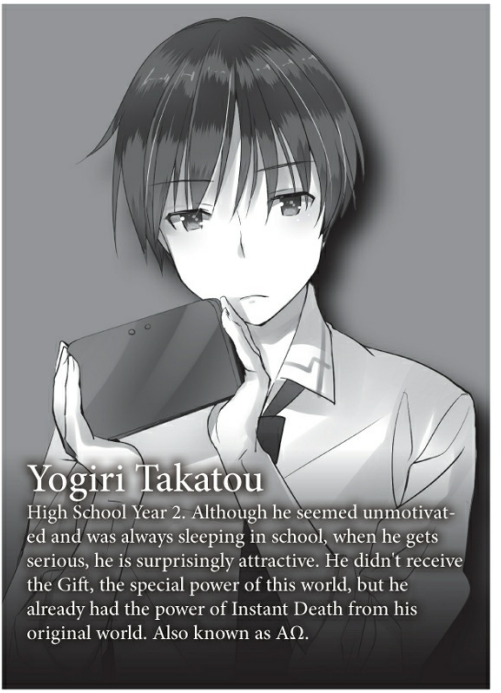
CHARACTERS

Tomochika Dannoura

High School Year 2. Although she looks quite attractive and has quite the ample chest, her role is unfortunately that of the Straight Man. Like Yogiri, she did not receive the power of the Gift, but she is trained in a martial art derived from the ancient Dannoura style of archery.

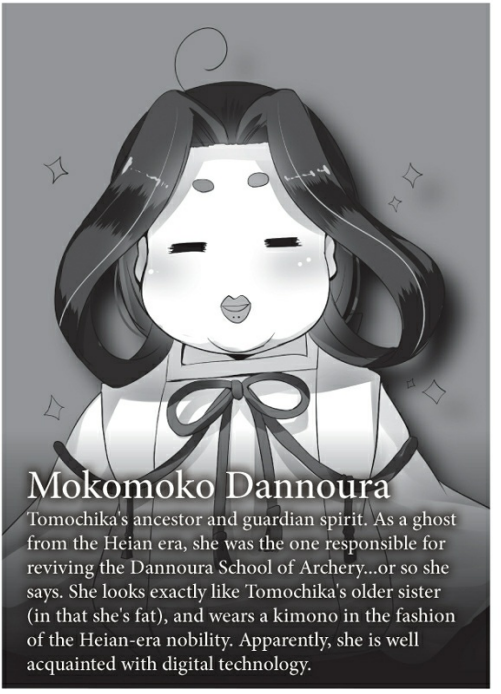


Yogiri Takatou

High School Year 2. Although he seemed unmotivated and was always sleeping in school, when he gets serious, he is surprisingly attractive. He didn't receive the Gift, the special power of this world, but he already had the power of Instant Death from his original world. Also known as AΩ.

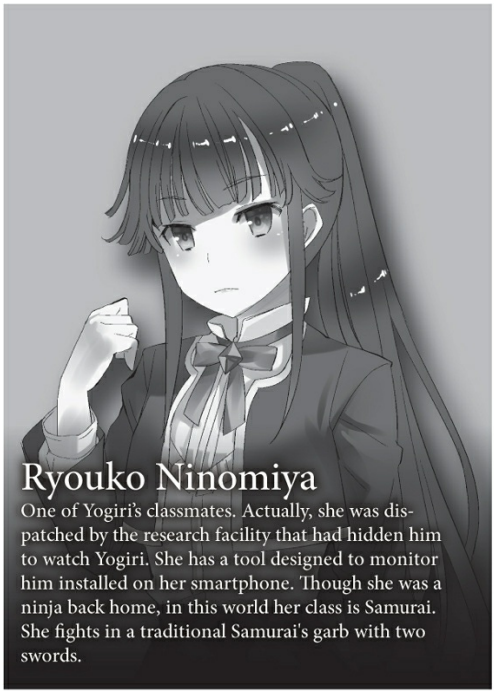
Asaka Takatou

A female college student who, while struggling to find work, ended up taking an interview at a suspicious institution known as the Independent Higher Life Form Research Facility, and unfortunately ended up finding work there. She normally ties her long hair up behind her head. At her new work place, she met AΩ, whom she named Yogiri.



Mokomoko Dannoura

Tomochika's ancestor and guardian spirit. As a ghost from the Heian era, she was the one responsible for reviving the Dannoura School of Archery...or so she says. She looks exactly like Tomochika's older sister (in that she's fat), and wears a kimono in the fashion of the Heian-era nobility. Apparently, she is well acquainted with digital technology.

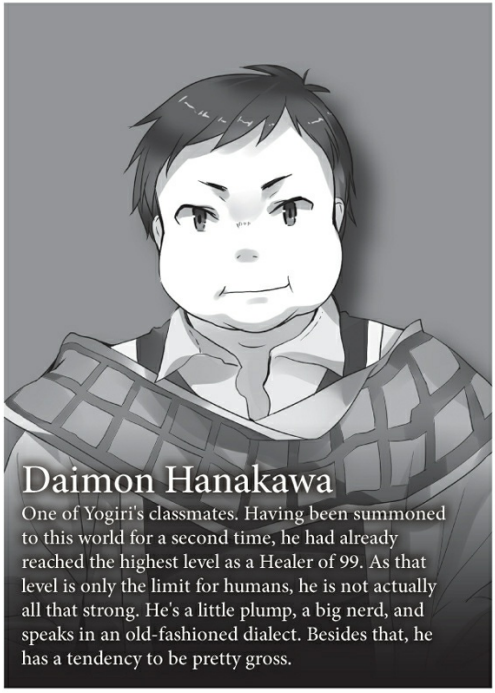


Ryouko Ninomiya

One of Yogiri's classmates. Actually, she was dispatched by the research facility that had hidden him to watch Yogiri. She has a tool designed to monitor him installed on her smartphone. Though she was a ninja back home, in this world her class is Samurai. She fights in a traditional Samurai's garb with two swords.

Enju Sumeragi

A girl who came to hide at the Independent Higher Order Lifeform Research Institute while Yogiri was living there with Asaka. One of the few people Yogiri grew attached to. For that reason, robots were made with her appearance to combat him. Part of the Sumeragi family, who rule Japan from the shadows.



Daimon Hanakawa

One of Yogiri's classmates. Having been summoned to this world for a second time, he had already reached the highest level as a Healer of 99. As that level is only the limit for humans, he is not actually all that strong. He's a little plump, a big nerd, and speaks in an old-fashioned dialect. Besides that, he has a tendency to be pretty gross.

Carol S. Lane

One of Yogiri's classmates. An American who joined their class as she entered high school. Like Ryouko, she was tasked with monitoring Yogiri, but she works for the Agency. Her class in this world is Ninja, and she wears a red ninja outfit and forehead protector when fighting. Her weapon is a ninja sword.

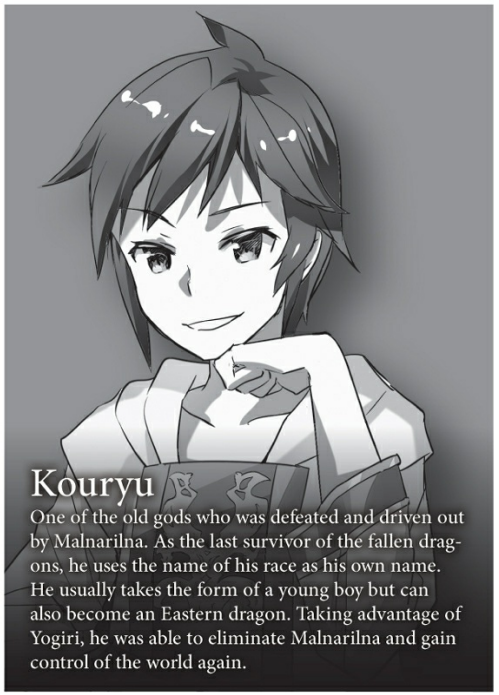
CHARACTERS

Haruto Ootori

One of Yogiri's classmates. Actually a bird beastkin, inheriting generations of inhuman blood. He can grow wings from his back and fly. When most of their classmates were killed in the capital and he was gravely injured, a god named Zakuro rescued him because of those wings, and now Haruto has decided to help him.

Shigeto Mitadera

One of Yogiri's classmates. His class in this world is Master Oracle. He has the ability to read fate, but the power works like a strategy guide, so it can't deal with unexpected situations. In order to defeat the Sages, he was trying to obtain the World Sword Omega Blade, but...



Kouryu

One of the old gods who was defeated and driven out by Malnarilna. As the last survivor of the fallen dragons, he uses the name of his race as his own name. He usually takes the form of a young boy but can also become an Eastern dragon. Taking advantage of Yogiri, he was able to eliminate Malnarilna and gain control of the world again.

Malnarilna

The god of the Malnarilna sect. They once ruled over this world but ended up taking an interest in Yogiri. After unsuccessfully sending apostles to kill him, they tried to do it themselves, but Rilna was killed by Yogiri. Malna was then caught in one of Kouryu's schemes and killed herself, but since she is a god, she will one day be resurrected.

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Chapter 1 — Since the World Is Going to Be Destroyed Anyway, We've Decided to Do as We Like!

It was like she was slowly sinking to the bottom of a sea of darkness. That was what the experience of death was like for Malna. Above the surface of the water, she could still see the world she had lived in, but she was unable to influence it anymore. How long would she be able to see it? Before long, darkness would close in around her and she wouldn't be able to see anything.

"Ah, dang it! This sucks! This totally sucks!"

She had let down her guard. She had underestimated Kouryu, thinking he was powerless. She could come up with any number of excuses, but the fact of the matter was that she had been outsmarted. She wanted to get back at him somehow, but she didn't know if her anger and frustration would last until her resurrection.

For a god, death wasn't the end, but she would be unable to do anything for a significant amount of time. Kouryu and Miranda were god-like beings themselves, so there was a chance they would still be alive when she came back. It was possible she could take revenge on them then, but she may have stopped worrying about it at that point.

"Actually, who cares about them? That's not who I'm angry at!"

Miranda had delivered the fatal blow, and Kouryu had set her up. But the one who had shaken her to the point of making her let her guard down in the first place was Yogiri Takatou. If she wanted revenge, that's who she should aim it at.

But there was no chance she could accomplish that. While he had some sort of special power, he was just a human. By the time she returned to life, he would be long dead.

"I guess there's nothing I can do..."

She had totally underestimated him. Because of that, she had been tripped

up. If she ever got another chance, she would destroy him with all her power right at the start. Paying no mind to the fact that he was just a human, she would thoroughly investigate everything about him and build a perfect plan to take him down. But no amount of struggling would help her now. Malna was dead. She had to accept that.

"So, now I'm bored. What should I do here?"

Looking around, there was nothing but darkness in every direction. Inevitably, her gaze returned to the world she had just left. She was still able to see things relatively clearly.

"Helloooo! Lady Malna!"

"Lady Rilna!"

"Mother!"

"Sis!"

"My lady!"

"Mal!"

"Ril!"

Hearing voices calling out to her, Malna focused on the source. At the surface of the water, she could see a group of beautiful young girls.

"Those kids... I already told them to figure out one name to call me."

They were the angels that Malna and Rilna had created by dividing up their own power. They were Malnarilna's hands and feet, passing on the gods' will to humans. However, even with the power given to them, they had no way of perceiving Malna. Death meant an absolute separation from the world, and neither side could cross that gap.

"We don't know if you can hear us, Lady Malnarilna, but we'll just assume you can and report what's going on!"

"This world is probably done for!"

"The seals you created have disappeared, and the fragments of the goddess have been reborn!"

"Huh? Aren't Malna and Rilna goddesses too? So what are goddess fragments? Like, their fingers?"

"Wow, your imagination is gross!"

"It does seem strange to call them that, so let's just go with 'goddess.'"

With Malna and Rilna dead, the seals they had created using their own existence as a foundation would be released. There was nothing surprising about that. The twin goddesses had sealed away dangerous enemies without

killing them, gradually stealing their power over time. The purpose of the seal was to absorb their enemies' strength without killing them *or* letting them live, so with Malnarilna's death, nothing would be left to draw on that power, which meant it would be returned to its rightful owners. Those beings would soon be free of the seals altogether.

"The Aggressors that were looking around before have clearly noticed and started searching in earnest now!"

"The ones trying to collect the fragments are fine, but the ones who want to destroy the fragments don't care one way or the other about this place, so it wouldn't be surprising if they tried to destroy the whole world."

"So! Since the world is going to be destroyed anyway, we've decided to do as we like!"

The angels were independent of Malnarilna, so it was possible they could continue living without the goddesses. However, having been created to support Malnarilna, the twins' disappearance meant the angels no longer had any purpose. It wouldn't have been strange for them to become desperate and start acting recklessly.

"For now, we'll try doing something about that Yogiri Takatou guy!"

"We can't forgive him for this! This is an insult to you as goddesses!"

"But Lady Malnarilna lost, right? So there's a chance we have no chance of beating him."

"So for now, we've sent a message out to all your believers to kill Yogiri Takatou! We showed up in their sleep and delivered a very professional looking oracle!"

"I think everyone will be very excited about it!"

"We know Lady Malna sent some assassins against him before, but now we're going for quantity over quality!"

"It should get pretty annoying! An awful lot of believers might die, though."

"But with Lady Malnarilna gone, having believers doesn't mean much, so it's probably okay!"

"Also, we didn't think the believers in this world would be enough, so we put in a request for assassins from other worlds as well."

"We don't really know how much that will cost."

"We have all the credits that you saved up from collecting faith, so we should be fine. You don't need them now that you're dead, right?"

“Hey, don’t touch those!”

She had left her assets in the hands of her angels, so if they felt like it, they were capable of going absolutely wild with her money. She never expected that to happen after she was dead, though. She had no idea how long it would take, but she had planned on using that money once she had come back to life.

“There’s a chance nothing we do will matter, so in that case we’ll probably make a big explosion to destroy the world. If the whole world blows up, it should kill him too.”

“If it’s going to get destroyed anyway, that’s fine, right?”

“No, it’s not! That’s not what ‘destroying the world’ means!” If they did that, the world serving as the foundation for Malna’s revival would cease to exist. Malna was determined to take back control after her revival.

“The management rights for the world were stolen by some guy named Kouryu, so we’re heading to the core of the world. If we stimulate the core directly, we should be able to make it go out of control.”

“Also, there’s nothing we can do about the guy who took the Heavenly Throne, so we’ve asked your mother to do something about him!”

“Stop it! This has nothing to do with her!” The god that had created Malnarilna could be called their mother. Having her clean up after their failures would be totally embarrassing. That was as true for a god like her as it would be for a human.

“Once your mother has gotten rid of Kouryu, we’ll have the control rights to the world again, so it should be easier to make it explode!”

“You like doing things like that, right, Malna?”

“Maybe to other people’s worlds, but not my own!”

The angels were like clones of Malnarilna, so they thought along the same lines. They were well aware of what Malna would think.

“Wasn’t there one more thing we were supposed to report?”

“There were more seals released, but we don’t know which ones.”

“Well, at this point it doesn’t really matter who comes back to life.”

“That’s all!”

After their one-sided report, the angels disappeared, flying off. Though Malna could see some things in her old world, she couldn’t look around freely. Without them calling out to her, she wouldn’t be able to trace their movements.

“Well...I have nothing else to do, so I guess I can just relax and watch.”

If the angels decided to do anything, it would probably have an effect regardless of where she was watching from, so she would be able to figure it out. For now, there was nothing more she could do.

“Actually, where’s Rilna?”

Rilna had died around the same time Malna had, so it wouldn’t be strange if she was close by. Since she had died first, if she was anywhere, she would be deeper down. Malna turned to the depths of the darkness. There was nothing but empty blackness. If someone was down there, she should have seen them. Light and dark were subjective here, so it wasn’t like the darkness could impede her vision.

But Malna was completely alone. No matter how much she doubted her eyes, she couldn’t see anyone but herself.

Chapter 2 — Stop Screwing with Me! Why Don't I Get a Beautiful Girl?!

Yogiri's group was walking through the tropical rainforest known as the Elven Forest. Mokomoko led the group using the Enju robot, with Tomochika Dannoura, Yogiri Takatou, and Daimon Hanakawa following in line behind her.

They were heading for the collection of buildings at the center of the hexagon made by the enormous trees. They had only been a kilometer away when they had been visited by Malnarilna, so it wasn't that much farther.

"Truly, I believed Sir Takatou would be capable of defeating Malnarilna somehow! My discerning eye has come through for me yet again!"

"Wouldn't things have just stayed the same for you if we had lost? You were still planning on sucking up to Malnarilna afterwards, right?"

"N-N-N-Not at all!" Hanakawa, still in his jester outfit, averted his eyes, confirming the lie in his words.

"By the way, what's up with your outfit? Is that the kind of thing you like?" Tomochika asked.

"You're just asking that now?! Sage Yoshifumi forced me to wear these clothes! Even someone as fashionably challenged as myself would never choose an outfit such as this!"

"Yoshifumi? You were with the Sage?"

Hanakawa had appeared in front of the rest of them out of nowhere. Yogiri hadn't cared where he'd come from, but now that he knew Hanakawa had been with Yoshifumi, he couldn't help but ask. After all, they were lost and wandering through the forest because they were trying to find the Sage.

"Quite so. I was taken captive and forced through all sorts of awful experiences." Hanakawa went on to explain at length everything that had happened since they had parted ways in the capital. It was a long story of him being swept along against his will, first by Akinobu Marufuji, Shigeto Mitadera, and Rei Kushima, who had brought him to Ent, then by Yoshifumi,

who had forced him into his service and brought him to the Elven Forest.

"Huh? I don't remember seeing Kushima and the others at the capital. Did they split off from everyone else?" Tomochika was clearly surprised. She had thought they had been killed somewhere.

"They traveled with us from the bus to the first town, but after that they ran off alone."

"So that means the survivors from our class are me, Takatou, Hanakawa, Carol, Ninomiya, Marufuji, Mitadera, and Kushima?"

"I believe Sir Marufuji is deceased now, so it's just the seven of us, I suppose."

"Hmm. It would be nice if we could all work together."

"But Hanakawa doesn't want to go back, remember?" Yogiri cut in.

"Actually, I have recently begun to change my mind. Things here have turned out much differently than expected..."

"Oh. Good luck, then."

"Hey! This is where you should be renewing your resolve, saying 'We're all going to make it back together!'"

"If it doesn't inconvenience us, we can bring you back too, but our main objective is to get ourselves home. I won't make any guarantees about looking out for anyone else."

They knew they could get back using the Philosopher's Stones, but they still didn't know exactly how many they would need. Finding Philosopher's Stones wasn't exactly an easy task, and the more of them they acquired, the more people died as collateral damage along the way. Yogiri wouldn't hesitate to use his power if he had to, but he also didn't feel compelled to go overboard to help some classmates he barely knew.

"As expected of Sir Takatou, you abandon your own classmates with ease. Such behavior is terrifying and not the least bit admirable! I would hope you could act a little more humane!"

"Well, to be honest, we're not really in a position to be worried about others," Tomochika commented.

"Tomochika, please! I was hoping you'd be the kind of heroine whose airheaded and shallow sense of justice gets us into all kinds of trouble!"

"Surviving is my top priority, though."

"The Dannoura way leaves no room for aiding one's allies. Rather than thinking of others, the best results can be reached if each individual ensures

the best outcome for themselves. Such are our teachings," Mokomoko said as she cut through the thick brush.

"Umm, now that I think of it, who is this lolita-esque girl leading us at the moment?"

"That'll be annoying to explain... She's a robot named Enju Sumeragi. She showed up out of nowhere." Explaining that she was being controlled by Mokomoko, Tomochika's guardian spirit, was too much trouble, so Yogiri didn't bother.

"What the hell?! How come everyone else gets one?!" Hanakawa suddenly exploded, taking them by surprise. "'My Book of Prophecy skill suddenly turned into a young girl!' 'A robot girl suddenly appeared out of nowhere!' Stop screwing with me! Why don't I get a beautiful girl?! Is asking for a slave girl to press her chest into me and say 'As expected of my master!' whenever I show my powers in the slightest so much to ask for?!"

"Don't ask me. Actually, didn't you just get a summoning power?" Yogiri asked. "Can't you summon a girl with that?"

"There is no way it would be so... There is... Huh? Wait, is that actually possible? I can summon *anything,* right? But no, if they refuse the summoning, it will fail to activate. Though it hurts to say it, I cannot imagine any young girls who would be willing to answer the call of someone like me."

"If you can summon *anything*, why not set the conditions to be a 'a young girl who likes people like you'?"

"Aha! Now that you mention it, that should work! Very well, then, allow me to do so..." Hanakawa stopped to focus on using his power, but Yogiri didn't feel the need to hang around and watch. "Err, why are you leaving? Are you not interested in seeing what I end up summoning?"

"We're not in a huge rush or anything, but we're too busy to stick around for your wife hunting," Yogiri replied.

"V-Very well! I shall wait until we reach a more secure location!" Hanakawa hurried to catch up.

"So, you said Yoshifumi is in the forest too?" The conversation had totally derailed, so Yogiri returned to what he was interested in asking.

"You say 'here,' so that must mean this is the Elven Forest after all?"

"Yeah, at least we think so."

"I am sure you are correct. It is hard to believe many forests like this

exist."

There were certainly any number of forests in the world, but this was an otherworldly domain that mimicked a rainforest. Yogiri couldn't imagine there were others like it.

"Do you know where Yoshifumi is?" he asked.

"Shortly after he entered the forest from the capital side, I was teleported here, so I cannot say precisely."

"He's looking for a sword, right? Which direction was he heading in?" Yogiri asked.

"I could not say. It appeared Sir Mitadera had some clue, though."

The forest was large, but if they were in the same place, there was a chance they would run into each other. Yogiri decided to keep that in mind.

"If this is the Elven Forest, I suppose there is a chance I may come across a beautiful young elf while I am here! Perhaps there is no need to summon a girl at all!"

"Hanakawa...the elves aren't what you think they are," Tomochika interrupted. "They're these weird bug-monkey things. It's like an affront to fantasy itself."

"Is that so? The elves I have come across seemed to match the typical description."

"What?" Tomochika froze. "No way! Where were they?!"

"The ones I met were in the Forest of Beasts. There was a dazzling young elf there."

"Then what are the things here?!"

"The only reason we had for believing they were elves was that they said the word once in their broken speech, I guess," Yogiri commented.

The creatures they had encountered were four-armed animals that looked to be both insects and monkeys. There was no guarantee they were actually elves.

"So wait, I can still have hope, right?!" Tomochika cried.

"Well, we know those other things live here, so I don't think the chance of finding normal elves is very high..." Yogiri suggested, but Tomochika was no longer listening.

"If you wished to see Sir Yoshifumi, why are you in a place like this?" Hanakawa asked.

"We heard we had to go through the forest to get to the capital, but once

we got inside, the space was all warped like the Lost Woods. We don't know how to get out, so we decided to just head for the middle."

"That sounds terrifyingly reckless—" Hanakawa suddenly stopped short. An arrow was sticking out of his chest. "What is this?!" He tore the arrow out.

"You seem pretty relaxed for having been shot by an arrow," Yogiri said.

"I am level ninety-nine, so this is not a real problem. But do you not possess some ability to detect killing intent?!"

"Sorry, it didn't even occur to me to try and protect you." Yogiri hadn't been paying any attention to the killing intent aimed at their unwelcome companion.

"An arrow... Does that mean elves?!" Tomochika exclaimed.

"It seems Tomochika isn't much concerned for my well-being either!"

"Where did it come from?" Yogiri had thought using a bow and arrow would be impossible in dense foliage, but that clearly wasn't the case.

"Guh! Th-There are more!"

As another arrow embedded itself in Hanakawa, Yogiri and Tomochika leaped behind him for safety. Even Mokomoko had returned at some point to use him as a shield.

"This is all wrong! Why are you using me for protection?!"

"You're pretty wide, so you're good cover."

"Good luck, Mr. Ninety-Nine!"

"Indeed. I am sure they fired at Hanakawa first due to his larger size making him an easier target," Mokomoko commented.

"A-Anyway, could you please use your special instant death power to stop whoever is firing these arrows?!"

"Don't do it, Takatou!" Tomochika immediately interjected.

"What?!"

"This time it might be real elves!"

"Why is your desire to see elves more important than my life?!"

"Against an archer, a student of the Dannoura School of Archery has no excuse for fleeing! Here, take Furemaru and don't hold back!"

Mokomoko tossed a black lump to Tomochika. As she grabbed it out of the air, it transformed into a large, black bow.

"Huh? What am I supposed to do?!"

"I set it to be non-lethal, so aim as if you intended to kill!"

“Well, if they’re not going to die, then okay.” Although a little hesitant, Tomochika seemed motivated.

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Chapter 3 — Perhaps a Dark-Skinned Elf with Huge Breasts Could Serve as Their Antithesis

Tomochika held a large, black bow, about as tall as she herself was. At first glance it appeared to be Japanese in style, but there were some clear differences. The tips tapered into spear-like points, which seemed designed to stab people with. It was a brutal weapon that displayed its vicious nature.

Furemaru had also expanded to cover her hands and forearms, serving the same purpose as an archer's gloves. Finally, the set was completed by a quiver hanging slanted at her waist, holding a single arrow.

"Umm, I must admit I am not quite sure how one puts a bow and arrow into non-lethal mode," Hanakawa said, confused by the android's declaration.

"It is possible because the arrow is also crafted from Furemaru. The arrowhead will expand the moment it contacts the enemy to restrain them!" Mokomoko replied proudly.

"Ohh! That is quite impressive, but I am not entirely sure what the purpose of building it into a bow and arrow is!"

"The bow is the fundamental weapon of the Dannoura School. While Furemaru could certainly be used to create a more efficient weapon for killing, suddenly switching to a new kind of weapon would be difficult for the user to manage."

"I see!" Hanakawa had no idea what Furemaru was, but he didn't want to derail the conversation, so he simply pretended he understood. "In that case, if you do not do something about our attacker soon, I feel I might be driven mad!"

In the heart of the Elven Forest, the arrows flying between the trees continued to strike Hanakawa as the other three hid behind him. Hanakawa looked like nothing more than a fat jester, but he was actually the maximum level possible for a human. A normal arrow wouldn't be able to kill him, and

he had healing magic on top of that. In fact, the arrows that were striking him were merely falling out of his body of their own accord. As long as his magical energy didn't run out, he wouldn't die, but that didn't stop the pain of being shot repeatedly. While he was accustomed to near-death situations, he couldn't bear the steady stream of arrows for much longer.

"All right, here I go!" Without a sound, Tomochika slipped out in front of Hanakawa.

"Umm! Will you be okay, Tomochika? Perhaps it is odd for me to point this out, but if you get struck by an arrow, you'll die, won't you?!"

"It's fine. I've mostly figured them out." Tomochika spun on her left foot, sliding into a stance facing perpendicular to the path of the incoming arrows. A moment later, she was completing her follow-through. In short, she had already fired the arrow. A cry sounded from far away. The steady stream of arrows heading towards them had stopped, so it seemed she had hit her mark.

"Huh? Should firing a bow not require a bit more time? Like pulling the arrow back and selecting a target?"

"You mean the eight steps of archery?" Mokomoko asked. "We have no such practice in the Dannoura School. All we are concerned with is firing as soon as possible."

"But how did you know where they were shooting from?" Yogiri wondered, confused. Given the vegetation, they couldn't possibly see the enemy. Even Hanakawa didn't know how she had found her target.

"The technique she used was to catch an arrow flying towards her and fire it back at her attacker. The moment she grabbed it, she knew the incoming arrow's vector, and was capable of calculating the location of its source!"

"Aha, so it is similar to Kenshiro's Two-Finger Interception!"

"Indeed! It is called the Dannoura Counter!"

"Can you not do something about that naming sense, though?" Hanakawa commented.

"Is that really what it's called?" Tomochika muttered with a bitter expression.

"However, Tomochika," Hanakawa spoke up again, "you seem awfully relaxed for having just done something rather incredible!"

"Given the correct circumstances, having an ancient martial art be matchless to the point of seeming like a cheat power is a rather common development in other-world stories..." Mokomoko remarked, trailing off as

she turned to glare at Yogiri. His instant death power had cleaned up the vast majority of situations they had come across, so there hadn't been many chances to show off the Dannoura School's abilities.

"What's the point of using a non-lethal weapon mode on your bow if you're just going to send their own arrows back at them?" Yogiri asked.

"Uhh..." Neither of the Dannoura women seemed to have an answer.

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Cutting their way through the Elven Forest, they soon reached their destination. A woman in a green hood sat leaning against a tree. A bow was lying on the ground, and an arrow was sticking out of her shoulder, so she was almost certainly the one who had been attacking them. Apparently, the arrow had struck a large blood vessel, as copious amounts of red covered the ground. She still seemed to be alive but didn't have the energy to move. Even with the four of them walking up to her, she barely reacted.

"No, no, no, what are we supposed to do now?! What happened to the non-lethal mode?!"

"That was obviously only for the arrow created from Furemaru! Why would you use the Counter in this situation?!"

Leaving the arguing Tomochika and guardian spirit alone, Yogiri checked their surroundings. There wasn't anyone aiming killing intent at them now. There might have been some people hiding nearby, but he couldn't tell. At the very least, it didn't seem like anyone would interfere.

"I guess it's Hanakawa's turn then?" Yogiri said.

He knew that Hanakawa was supposed to be a Healer. They had never actually seen him use his magic, but he had claimed he could heal any injury in an instant. As someone who had attacked them, Yogiri wasn't particularly worried about whether she lived or died, but they needed information. If they could figure out the situation by talking to her, that would be best.

"Oh, you are correct! There is little chance of me earning Tomochka's favor at this point, so it is best I attempt to do so with someone new! Rescuing her from certain death is sure to make her look favorably upon me, no?!"

"Does it count if we're the ones who brought her close to death?"

"Even if we heal her, she might demand that we take her life, but that is in

its own way appealing!”

Hanakawa approached the fallen woman and pulled back her hood. Long, golden hair spilled down.

“Why are you checking her face first?” Yogiri asked. “Just heal her.”

“There is a possibility her face could be unseemly enough that I wouldn’t feel the need to heal her, and it would be a true nuisance to have someone like that begin following us around... Oh, she is actually quite an attractive young woman. And if I am not mistaken, is she not one of the elves we were speaking of?”

Though she was sickly pale, there was no doubting her beauty. On top of that, she had long, pointed ears.

“She is! Finally, an actual elf! Wait, no, I can’t let my guard down! It might be some weird monster that just has an elf’s face!” Tomochika was still suspicious.

“Whether she’s an elf or not, can you hurry up and heal her?” Yogiri urged his classmate on again. “It looks like she’s going to die.”

“Very true!”

Hanakawa placed a hand on the elf’s shoulder. As he did, her body was wrapped in a faint glow. The arrow dropped out of her shoulder, and color returned to her face. As the glowing faded away, Hanakawa stepped back to rejoin the others.

“Did it work?” If that was all it took to heal such a serious injury, Yogiri was pretty impressed.

“If she was dead, it would have failed to have any effect. Therefore, she must be alive and thus healed.”

As they waited, the young elf slowly opened her eyes. Though she seemed a bit dazed at first, she soon noticed the four of them and began to glare up at them.

“How dare you, human scum!”

“There it is!” Hanakawa cried. “Meek and submissive is fine, but for an elf, arrogant and haughty is clearly the best!”

“Perhaps you and Tomochika would prefer to enjoy being looked down on by this elf some more, but that sounds dull to me,” Mokomoko interrupted. “Let us move this along.” As she spoke, the archery set Tomochika was holding jumped towards the elf. All at once it lost its shape, transforming into a kind of cord and wrapping itself around the stranger.

“What do you intend to do with me?!”

“We simply wish to ask you some questions,” Mokomoko explained, “but we won’t force you to answer. However, if you are unwilling to speak, as someone who attacked us, there will be nothing for us to do but end your life.”

“Then kill me! I have nothing to discuss with a human!”

“Is that so?” the ghost replied in a monotonous voice as the cord made from Furemaru began to tighten.

“Hey, wait! Stop! You’re actually trying to kill me, aren’t you?!” the elf immediately cried.

“That is disappointing.” Mokomoko sighed. “Surely you could at least try to put on a brave face a little longer.”

“But wouldn’t you normally leave a bit more room for negotiations?!” their captive replied. “I was hoping you’d try hard enough to give me an excuse to actually talk!”

“Oh? So you are willing to speak with us, then?”

“I mean...I don’t want to die, so...”

“That’s pretty selfish, coming from someone who was trying to kill us.” Her lack of resolve rubbed Yogiri the wrong way.

“What do you want from me?! You’re the ones who are trespassing in our domain!”

“I guess you’re right. We did come here without permission,” Yogiri said. “But you could have given us a warning or something. If you attack us out of nowhere, of course we’ll fight back.”

“We did give you a warning!”

“Did you? Oh, those things. So, they’re your friends after all?” Yogiri recalled their encounter with the bug-monkey things. They were the only encounter that had come close to serving as a warning.

“They are one of our peoples. They should have told you that you were

approaching holy ground and not to proceed any further! If you ignore that warning, of course you will be attacked!"

"Was that really a warning?" Tomochika asked, cocking her head. "I didn't understand anything they said."

Their magical translators hadn't been able to interpret the creatures' speech, so they had only caught a few individual words and couldn't understand what they wanted.

"Okay, you don't want us going any farther, right? Then we won't," Yogiri said.

"But what if that Yoshifumi guy is in there?" Tomochika asked.

"If the people who live here don't want us coming in, we shouldn't force our way through, should we?"

"Well...I guess. There's no guarantee we'll find him if we search around here. If we wait around the capital, he'll probably come back eventually."

"What are you talking about?"

At the elf's question, Yogiri offered a rough explanation of their situation.

"Are you stupid? If you were trying to get out of the forest, why did you head to the middle of it?"

"When we looked from above, the forest continued forever. We had no idea which direction to go in."

Yogiri had guessed it was something like the Lost Woods. Space was interconnected in a confused jumble, making it impossible to simply walk out.

"Okay. If you agree not to infringe on our holy ground and wish to leave the forest, I will assist you."

"If possible, we want to exit to the east. It would be pointless to exit on the west side."

"I understand. Could you please release my restraints?"

"Mokomoko."

"Very well." The cords around the elf were released, merging into a single clump before falling at the robot's feet. "You do not seem to be a fool, but just to be sure, I have left a part of that cord attached to you. I would advise against trying anything."

"I have no reason to fight you at this point."

Although reluctant, the elven girl seemed to understand her situation.

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"We will be traveling together for a while, so it would be inconvenient not to know each other's names. I am Fuwat." As they walked, the elf introduced herself.

Instead of heading for the center of the forest, they were now walking towards the elven settlement. Apparently, Fuwat needed to make a report first.

"I'm Tomochika Dannoura."

"My name is Mokomoko Dannoura."

"Yogiri Takatou."

"I am known as Daimon Hanakawa! I am a level ninety-nine Healer, a member of the party of heroes who repelled the Demon Lord's invasion of the Kingdom of Iman. Though I participated primarily in the planning, I believe it is no exaggeration to call myself a hero! Oho! My apologies. I am the one responsible for treating your injuries with my healing magic, so how do you feel, Miss Fuwat? My healing ability is at the pinnacle of what can be achieved by humans, so I imagine there are no lingering effects!"

Even though Mokomoko had been introduced to Hanakawa as "Enju Sumeragi," Hanakawa hadn't paid any mind to the fact she had just used the name "Mokomoko Dannoura."

"What are you blabbering on for?!" Tomochika complained.

"I see," Fuwat said. "You have my thanks. I appreciate you healing me, but I would be even more appreciative if you could not stand so close." Fuwat immediately stepped away from him.

"Why?!"

"So, you're an elf, right, Fuwat?" Tomochika asked.

"Yes. And?" She seemed confused by the question.

"And, uhh, you only have two arms and two legs under that robe, right? You don't have, like, a mouth on your stomach or tentacles or anything?"

"What on earth do you think I am?!"

"I was just wondering whether elves were different from us somehow."

"We don't seem much different to me," Fuwat said, opening the front of her robe. Underneath, light clothing covered a slender frame. As far as they could see, there were no discernible differences between her and a human.

"So that's what an elf looks like after all! Not some half-bug-half-monkey

thing. Delicate and ephemeral, with long, golden hair and pointed ears!" Tomochika finally seemed satisfied.

"No, from my perspective, it seems that elves with enormous breasts have become more popular these days," Hanakawa said. "While I have been mistaken for a lolicon in the past, to be completely honest, my tastes tend towards the breasts being as large as possible! Well, perhaps it is fine to have small-chested elves here to provide contrast. In that case, perhaps a dark-skinned elf with huge breasts could serve as their antithesis?"

"No one's listening, you know."

"You're so cold..."

"I agree, the bigger the boobs, the better," Yogiri said.

"Sir Takatou...is this perhaps the first time we have been on the same wavelength?"

"Despite your stupid conversation, we've made it," Fuwat interrupted them.

Passing through the densely growing trees, they came upon a clearing populated by simple wooden buildings. It wasn't a particularly large settlement, so they hadn't been able to see it from above. Despite it being the middle of the day, the village seemed quiet, with few people walking around.

"Ah, they're here too," Yogiri noted.

Within the village were the four-armed bug-monkey creatures. It seemed they were working to help the elves.

"Let us speak with the elder first. I will explain who you are."

They walked to the center of the village. Although the buildings seemed more or less identical, there was one that was slightly larger, which must have belonged to the elder.

The elves they passed watched them with suspicion. They normally attacked anyone who entered the forest, so they must have viewed humans as their enemies. Fuwat was leading them through the village without restraining them, so without knowing the situation, they were hesitant.

"I guess not everyone wears those robes," Tomochika observed.

"These are only for hunting."

Perhaps due to the heat, the elves wore fairly light clothing. And naturally, they were all exceptionally beautiful.

"This is...the perfect chance for an event where we meet a beautiful elven girl!"

“Elves don’t see people who are abnormally large as a person capable of procreating, so please try to lose some weight first.”

“Huh? What about seeing who I am on the inside?”

“I’m surprised you’d be willing to show that to someone,” Yogiri said, taken aback by Hanakawa’s self-confidence.

“Right here.” As Fuwat indicated the elder’s house, the door opened and a young man stepped out.

“You guys? I never would have thought I’d meet *you* here.” The boy was shocked. He clearly hadn’t stepped out to greet them.

“Huh? Who are you?” Tomochika was confused.

“I’m Ootori. Haruto Ootori. Maybe you don’t recognize me without my glasses?”

“Ootori?! Why are you here?!”

Even after hearing his name, Yogiri had no idea who the guy was.

Chapter 4 — For Now, Let's Find a Girl I Can Do Adult Things With

Haruto Ootori was a bird beastkin, something that had been true of him long before he came to this world. The Ootori family had carried inhuman blood for generations. Haruto was proud of his heritage, so he thought his natural gifts would work to his advantage in this world.

Though he normally repressed his abilities, at full strength he was dozens of times stronger than an ordinary human and was practiced in his family's martial arts as well. He could sprout wings from his back to fly, fire off feathers to use as an attack, and wrap himself in those same feathers to create a powerful shield.

On top of that, he had gained the power of a Consultant upon coming to this world. The Consultant class allowed him to offer advice to others, so he had access to a wealth of information. Between that and his strength, Haruto had figured he would be more than capable of surviving here.

But things hadn't gone as planned. He had attempted to work with a Sage, as she had demanded, but her whims had brought all his plans to ruin. He had been forced into a battle to the death with his classmates, faced a bizarre meat monster consuming the Underworld (the world below the capital), and when he had attempted to fly away, he had been caught in a fiery explosion.

He had no idea what had happened down there, but if that was the kind of danger this world regularly posed, there would be no way for him to prepare for it. Although he had been severely burned by the explosion, he had flown as far as he could manage before passing out. And when he'd woken, he'd found his wounds being treated by a man who called himself a god.

Perhaps due to that treatment, the Gift given to him by the Sage had been erased, and he no longer needed to use his glasses either. When he had asked why this person had bothered to treat him, seeing as he had no connection to the so-called god at all, the man had only responded that he had the ability to help someone who was near death, so why wouldn't he? He had no interest in

Haruto himself.

Following that, the god had asked Haruto if he would help him in searching for something.

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Haruto sat across from Yogiri's group at a table in Fuwat's house. Though they had gone to see the elder, they didn't have anything in particular to discuss with him and had mostly gone just to greet him. Fuwat still had things to discuss with him, so Haruto had taken them to Fuwat's house ahead of her. Hanakawa had left them at some point, but no one seemed to mind.

"You guys might be surprised to see me," Haruto started, "but believe me, I'm quite surprised to see you too."

Yogiri should have died in the trap Haruto had set for him. It had been a complicated, roundabout method to try to avoid his ability to sense killing intent. He had confirmed that the cliff had collapsed and dropped Yogiri into the abyss, but apparently that hadn't been enough to kill him.

But even if he hadn't died from the fall, there had been that bizarre flesh consuming the Underworld and the enormous explosion that had followed it. He had assumed those would be enough to kill him, but it seemed Yogiri and Tomochika had both survived. While Haruto had been on the verge of death himself, these two had passed through the same trials without issue. At this point, it all just seemed ridiculous. Now free of the Sage, Haruto had no reason to make an enemy of Yogiri, so he felt no need to meddle with him further.

The biggest surprise, however, was Enju Sumeragi. Why was a direct descendant of the Sumeragi family—those who ruled over the beastkin—here, of all places? She might have been summoned to this world in a similar way to Haruto's class, but he couldn't help feeling that there was some purpose behind a girl who was essentially his princess showing up in front of him.

"Uhh...what do we start with?" Tomochika said. "That Underworld was pretty crazy, huh? I thought everyone else had died."

"Ah, yeah, I can fly. So I just kind of left."

"Your class is Consultant, right? That lets you fly?"

"Shouldn't Miss Sumeragi know full well who I am?" Haruto glanced at

Enju. They had met a number of times, but even if she didn't recognize him, she should have clued in after hearing the name Ootori.

"Hm? Are you speaking of me? My apologies, but I am not the real Enju Sumeragi."

"What do you mean?" It didn't seem like she was playing dumb. She clearly didn't know anything about him.

"Hm. Now that you mention it, I know almost nothing about this body..." she muttered.

"This is a robot," Yogiri commented offhandedly. "We ran into some guy who could summon things from our world, and this was one of the things he summoned."

"No way..."

Upon closer inspection, she did seem to lack the intimidating aura of the rulers of the beastkin. He couldn't tell if she truly was a robot just by looking at her, but he could at least accept that she wasn't a member of the Sumeragi family.

"I thought the same, since I knew Enju too. But it looks like her being summoned was just random chance."

"Well, extraordinary people have a way of gathering other important people around them without trying," the android mused.

"So, why are you here, Ootori? For that matter, how did you get here before us?" Tomochika asked.

"Okay, let me explain things in order." He probably didn't need to bother telling them. It wouldn't be hard to hide it all. But there also wasn't much need to talk to them in the first place. He had already completed his objective in the village, so he could leave whenever he wanted.

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Why was he talking with them at all, then? To put it simply, he had stopped caring about anything. He was so small and insignificant that he couldn't make any difference in this world. Trying to plot and scheme at this point seemed ridiculous. That was the conclusion he had come to.

"Wait, can I ask something?" Yogiri cut in. "Who exactly are you, Ootori? We kind of skipped over that earlier."

"I'm a bird beastkin. I can grow wings from my back and fly."

"A bird?! Wings?!" Tomochika exclaimed.

"Hm. I have heard of such people," the robot said.

"You have?! Wait, you said something earlier about knowing vampires, didn't you?!"

"Then judging by what you said earlier, Enju has something to do with the beastkin?" Yogiri asked.

"The Sumeragi family rule over the beastkin. Essentially, we have to do anything they say."

"Oh, really? All I heard was that they ruled Japan from the shadows." Yogiri seemed to know Enju, but he didn't know about her connection to the beastkin.

"What is with our world?!" Tomochika shouted. "At this point, I'm not sure I'm even comfortable going home!"

"If you peel back the thinnest layer, you will find our world overflowing with the bizarre and the supernatural!" Enju proclaimed. "That is the kind of world we come from!"

"Explaining everything about the beastkin will take a while, so let me get back on topic." Haruto then offered a brief explanation of the journey that had brought him there. After escaping the Underworld, he'd been picked up by a god calling himself Zakuro, who had set Haruto free after treating him, but Haruto had agreed to his request to help look for something afterwards.

"So, this god named Zakuro is looking for an even higher-ranked god, and you're helping him with that."

"To put it simply, yes. Zakuro gave me a number of possible locations to search. This was one of them. Is that enough explanation for why I'm here?"

"Excuse me!" Tomochika raised her hand like she was in a classroom. "I heard that if you fly, you'll get caught by the Sage's defense network and be attacked. Is that not a problem for you?"

"With the power Zakuro gave me, my ability to fly has been greatly

improved. I could probably escape before anything showed up to attack me."

"I kind of understand your situation now, but doesn't that bother you?" Yogiri asked.

"Yeah, you don't have to do what that guy tells you!" Tomochika added. "Do you want to come with us instead?"

"What? Are we bringing more people with us?"

"Hey, if we're willing to take Hanakawa, that must mean we're accepting anyone."

"I appreciate the offer, but I'll have to decline," Haruto replied. Zakuro wasn't forcing him to cooperate. He respected Haruto's free will. But beastkin had an innate instinct to serve those more powerful than themselves. The God of Beasts they served in their home world had been destroyed long ago, so Haruto couldn't help but recognize Zakuro as his new deity.

"Well, if you don't want to, that's up to you."

"Right. I'm just doing what I want to do. By the way, what brings you guys here?"

"It's not like we really wanted to be here..." Tomochika explained their journey so far. They were traveling in search of Philosopher's Stones, and they had come to the forest in search of yet another Sage. They had ended up getting lost along the way and had come to the village in search of a way out. "Speaking of which, do you know how to get out of here, Ootori?" she asked.

"I never even realized this was like a Lost Woods. But I came in from the sky, so I imagine I could leave the same way."

"I see. Perhaps the spatial warping does not extend that high..." Enju murmured.

"So, like a loophole in the system. Or maybe a bug?"

"Either way, we can't fly ourselves."

"Even if we create wings with Furemaru, the best we can manage is gliding," the robot agreed.

"I'm sorry to say this, but I don't think I could carry you out if I wanted to." It wasn't totally impossible, but Haruto had no obligation to help them. He had talked to them out of their curiosity after seeing Enju Sumeragi, but he had nothing else to gain from them.

Haruto decided to head for his next objective.

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Hanakawa had split off from the rest of the group and headed for the outskirts of the village, finding a spot behind one of the houses where there would be no passersby. Deciding he was in a sufficiently safe place, he put his plan from earlier into motion.

“Thinking about it, I have never tried to perform this summoning properly, have I?”

When he had summoned Malnarilna, he had only needed to yell in a loud voice, so it was hard to say whether his power to “summon anything” had even come into play. Although it had worked the first time, if his ability to summon things allowed him to set criteria, it should have had a more systematic method for utilizing it.

“System window, open!”

A half-transparent system window appeared in Hanakawa’s vision. As something he had used since his first time coming to this world, he was more than capable of opening it without saying anything and could even use his skills without having to consciously activate them, but it was all a matter of personal preference.

The window showed his basic stats. Class: Healer. Level: 99. While he possessed a large amount of magical energy, despite being the highest level possible for a human, his other stats were fairly low. Even gaining the summoning ability hadn’t changed his class.

“Hmm. I thought a dual class of Healer and Summoner would be cool, but... Anyway, putting that aside for now.”

Selecting the skill window, he saw a list of skills he could use. “Summon Anything” was one of them.

“Hm. I suppose it truly is part of the Battle Song system.”

The power given to him by the twin goddesses must have been the same as the one given to him when he had first been summoned. However, that likely meant the summoning power was limited.

“I suppose there is nothing for it but to try it. The Sages were capable of summoning us from Japan, so I imagine it would at least be capable of doing that much.”

Hanakawa selected the Summon Anything skill from the list, and a number of text fields appeared. That must have been where he was supposed to enter the criteria for the summoning.

“If I am too specific, there may be no applicable candidates, so first of all,

let us begin with a beautiful young girl."

Having grown well used to the system window, he was able to make entries using only his thoughts. When he entered his criteria into the text field, a list of names and faces began to populate the screen. There were ten thousand results. It was hard to believe there were only ten thousand people who qualified as "beautiful young women," so that must have been the maximum number of results it could display.

"Oho, I thought such a parameter would be awfully vague, but it appears to have filtered them based on my personal tastes."

Skimming through the list, there were none he would turn down. Beautiful young women of all kinds were listed.

"However, deciding based on the face alone seems insufficient... Ah, it is still set to summary view. Let us see if we can change this to a detailed view...like so!"

The list expanded to show detailed information about all of the candidates. It showed their full body, height, weight, and physical measurements.

"I see, there is even a lamia in here. If I decided based on face alone, I might have ended up with something fantastical. Then let us set it to human... Wait, I don't mind if they have cat ears... Okay, anything with two legs and two arms, then. Next, let's set the bust size to F or larger. I have nothing in particular against the lolis, but I wouldn't want to give the impression that is what I am into... Ohh, even with this many conditions, still ten thousand results! The world is truly a huge place!"

Even after removing those who didn't satisfy his conditions, it still displayed the maximum number of results.

"At this rate, I should be able to be very precise... Wait! Looks should be put on hold for now! First I need a girl who will be interested in someone like me! I must add that restriction first!"

Hanakawa added the condition of "someone who likes people like Daimon Hanakawa." He didn't know if such vague criteria would work, but so far the system had handled similar requests fairly well.

"How exciting. Now, what kind of beautiful women are waiting for me?" But after showing the symbol of an hourglass as if to say it was loading, the system window stopped responding. "Wait, there's no way it would just freeze, right?!"

After a considerable amount of time, it finally displayed some results. There were three.

"What?! That is all?! Actually, the fact there are three is something I should be thankful for! It is difficult to say which of them is best, and I can always summon all three, so let us begin with the first result!"

Hanakawa selected the first girl in the list and tried to summon her. Once again, there was no response.

"Why is it taking so long?! Is it trying to make me worried?!"

But no matter how long he waited, there was no indication that anything would happen.

"Perhaps with Malnarilna's death, the skill lost its function?! No, the search was still possible, so it should be working..."

"Are you the one who tried to summon me?"

Hanakawa suddenly heard a voice.

"Ah, yes, that was me!"

It was a cute voice. His expectations began to swell.

"Umm! You are one who is interested in men like myself, are you not? Not just my looks, but my personality as well?"

"Yeah, I am."

"And speaking concretely, since being 'interested' could mean many things, you are willing to do adult things with me?!"

"Sure."

"Ohh! Then please come!"

"Huh?"

"Eh?"

"Summon me, then."

"Uhh, that is what I am attempting to do..."

"Ahh. It looks like your summoning ability has a maximum range of ten worlds. We're about a hundred worlds apart. Sorry, I don't think I can make it there on my own power. That's too bad."

And then he couldn't hear the voice anymore.

"What the hell! Why is it displaying results with people I am incapable of summoning?!"

Then again, there was a possibility that even if he couldn't summon them, they could use their own power to reach him. So they were technically viable candidates for the search.

“Well, in that case, allow me to restrict the search to those who are within range... Why is it saying zero results?! I cannot be *that* off-putting!”

As far as looks went, there was no accounting for taste. Surely there must have been someone who liked guys like him. But perhaps including his character had made the search too restrictive.

“In that case, let us just select a girl I can get pervy with... No, if that’s all I want, I only need to pay for it. I have this powerful summoning ability, so I should be looking for something more, someone who would truly love me from the bottom of her heart. Wait, I can just set the condition to someone who is capable of reaching me with her own power!”

He changed the criteria from “within summoning range” to “capable of reaching me with their own power.” After a short wait, the search window displayed a single result.

“One result... No, isn’t this actually incredible?! Even across all worlds, there is one single individual who is a perfect match for me! Truly this must be some sort of fate!”

He immediately selected the single result. A magic circle appeared on the ground in front of him. A pillar of light erupted from the circle, fading to reveal a young woman. Long black hair, a small frame, and a huge chest. She was exactly the type of girl Hanakawa was into. As their eyes met, her face broke into a smile. Her glistening eyes and flushed cheeks showed that she clearly liked what she saw in him as well.

“Umm, my name is Daimon Hanakawa!” He didn’t really know how to start off with her, so he began by introducing himself and offering a handshake.

Normally most people reacted to him like they would a poisonous insect, but this time she clearly had a positive impression of him right from the start. The girl stepped closer. There was no displeasure in her face at all. Just as Hanakawa began to feel relieved that things had finally gone well for him, his outstretched right arm suddenly disappeared.

“Huh?”

Her jaw expanded far more than should have been possible, dripping blood as she chewed.

“Delicious...”

Swallowing what was in her mouth, she showed an expression like she was melting with pleasure.

Hanakawa screamed. “Is this what it meant when it said I was her type?!”

His right arm had been bitten off at the elbow. Such an injury wasn’t truly of any concern to him, though, and he healed it back instantly.

“Amazing... You’re so delicious, and I can just keep eating forever?!”

The girl gave a radiant smile, her dazzling features slightly ruined by the drool that began to pour from her mouth.

“This is the worst case of good compatibility ever!”

Hanakawa regretted summoning her from the bottom of his heart.

Chapter 5 — What Kind of Power Is That?! Why Is It Specific to Me?!

“Uhh, please, let’s calm down first!”

Hanakawa felt like he had said something very similar recently. It had worked fine with Yogiri, who could discuss things with a level head, but this time he would really be in trouble if he couldn’t get this girl to step back.

“I am plenty calm right now,” she replied. “I just couldn’t resist for a moment.”

“That is what we consider not being calm! Normally, one would never bite off the arm of someone one just met!”

“Really?” she said, tilting her head in confusion.

“Excuse me! You are supposed to be someone who is fond of me, correct?! In that case, biting off my arm or wounding me in general is going to injure my feelings!”

“Why?”

“She really doesn’t get it... Umm! To sum it up frankly, I was looking for a girl who would permit adult activity, or rather welcome it, and allow me to do whatever I wished with her! But you are not like that at all, are you?!”

She was certainly as beautiful as he could have hoped, and her figure was exactly what he was after, but he wasn’t at all interested in someone who could open her mouth that wide, or whose jaw strength was enough to bite off a person’s arm.

“‘Adult things’?”

“Ugh! Such an innocent question leaves me troubled... It is what we call a euphemism. It means something like two becoming one, or actions taken to produce children...”

“You mean reproduction?”

“Putting it so scientifically seems like a good way to dodge the issue. Correct! That is precisely it. So inflicting injury on me does not accomplish that! While it may be true that I have something of a masochistic streak, that

only goes as far as things such as being stepped on! Or having someone sit on my face! A light form of S&M, like as a fashion sense! I am not at all interested in receiving actual physical harm!"

"If I eat you, we'll be 'two becoming one,' right?"

"I kind of suspected you might say something like that, but absolutely not!"

"By reproduction, don't you mean me consuming your genetic information, mixing it with my own at random, and then creating a new being with that genetic code?" the girl asked.

"Huh? Well, uhh..." Hanakawa stumbled backwards. He was starting to realize just how dangerous this person was.

"I'm sure the two of us will be able to make adorable children."

"Okay, I quit! Let us pretend we never met! It pains me greatly to say this after calling you here, but could you please return to where you came from?!

"No...I don't think I will."

"Ugh. You are incredibly cute, so that is exactly the kind of line I would like to hear from you under normal circumstances, but I feel that if I fall for you now, I'll meet a terrible fate!"

"Don't worry, I'll make sure I don't kill you. You can grow parts back, right?"

"I can *heal*, yes! But that is not the issue at hand!"

"Then there's no problem," she said. "I could just eat you all at once, but if I eat you piece by piece, I can enjoy you forever, right? So I'll hold back. I promise I won't kill you."

"How kind of you to spare me!"

This is too dangerous! I have been in so many dangerous situations, but this is clearly the worst. How do I escape from this?!

It didn't seem like anything he could do would deceive her, so talking his way out of it wasn't an option. And no matter how gross he tried to be, she probably wouldn't mind.

"Please allow me to confirm one thing," Hanakawa tried. "What do you intend to do with me?"

"Take you home and enjoy you where no one can get in the way."

"That is not the way I want to get taken to a girl's home!"

She pulled a bag out from somewhere.

"What is that?"

“It’s a bit rough getting back to my place,” she explained,” so if you don’t go in here, you’ll probably die.”

“I feel like I’ll die the moment I go inside it!”

It was a large bag, but it wasn’t big enough to hold him. He would need to shrink considerably to fit inside.

If I allow her to take me home, I’ll experience an eternal hell of being slowly eaten alive, won’t I? Wouldn’t dying be better? No, I mustn’t surrender! I must find a way to escape!

“Uhh, I feel like I heard once that if you raise cattle tenderly, the flavor it brings out is better than if they are raised in a stressful environment.”

“No, it’s tastier if they’re stressed out. When you suffer, your brain releases something like neurotransmitters to suppress the pain. Those make the meat taste really good.”

“Oh, this is no good. Our values are too different.”

There was no convincing her, which meant his only options were to fight, be rescued, or run away. It didn’t seem like he had a chance of beating her in a fight. Hanakawa had been unable to even follow her movements when she bit off his arm. Furthermore, she was strong enough to easily tear off his arm with her jaws. He had no chance of winning, so that was out of the question.

If he was hoping to be rescued, his best bet was Yogiri. Yogiri would be able to kill her no matter who she was. But even if he shouted from here, Yogiri wouldn’t be able to hear him. He had come to the edge of the village specifically so that no one could interfere. And even if Yogiri did hear him, it was hard to believe he would come running to his aid. He could always try and head to Yogiri himself, but that just meant the same thing as running away. Of course, if he considered fleeing, he couldn’t imagine he would be able to outrun her.

I must think of something using my own skills and items!

He possessed a number of things he had collected from the last time he was summoned to this world, but in the end they were only objects that someone of his level was capable of acquiring. There wasn’t anything particularly rare in his collection, so they were all items that almost anyone could find.

The most powerful artifact I possess is this slave collar, which I risked my life for... Is there perhaps some way I could make her put it on of her own accord?

The difference in their physical abilities was so great that forcing it on her would be impossible, and there was always the possibility that she was so powerful it wouldn't even work in the first place.

Speaking of which, who exactly is she?

He checked the search window. Her name was Carla. Besides that, all it listed was her three measurements, but below that he saw another "details" button. He pressed it.

Foundation Eater. Her true form is large enough to swallow a Celestial Foundation (universe) whole. Although she originally ate entire worlds all at once, after hundreds of years, she has come to develop a preference for certain flavors. As her enormous form can't differentiate tastes well, she has created smaller avatars of herself to act within the Foundations themselves. Carla is one of those avatars, and while frail and weak compared to her main body, she is on the level of a god while within a Foundation. She exists outside of the system but has registered as a user with a number of different systems to search for information on various delicacies.

"I should have read this before I summoned her!" Hanakawa dropped to the ground, defeated. She was far too powerful for him. "What am I supposed to do?!"

It was best to assume his items wouldn't work on her. The only options he had left were his healing and summoning skills. Healing didn't seem particularly useful here, so it was all down to summoning.

I could summon someone who is capable of matching Miss Carla... But no, that would only make the situation worse! In that case... He could summon Yogiri. He immediately began to search for him.

"Wait, he's not here! I'm even searching for him by name! What?! What is going on?!"

"What are you doing?" Carla interrupted. "Can I eat a bit more?"

"No, you cannot! Umm, if you are hungry, food tastes much better, so the longer you wait to eat, the more delicious I will become!"

"Oh. I never thought of that. If I hold off, you'll taste better... That might be true." For some reason she accepted what Hanakawa said, so he had managed to buy a bit more time.

"Uhh, okay! Then let me call Tomochika!"

If he summoned Tomochika, Yogiri would come looking for her. This time, his search successfully found his target, but her name was grayed out, indicating he was already blocked.

“Blocked?! But I can’t summon her without her consent anyway!”

There were a lot of conditions on his Summon Anything skill. It couldn’t summon someone by force. Glancing back at Carla, he saw that she was trying to stretch open the mouth of her bag. She seemed determined to fit him inside.

All I can do is run... Wait!

Struck by a new idea, he immediately tried it. He put his own name in the search window, and his information popped up instantly. He was able to summon himself. Of course, if he just summoned himself now, he would appear where he already was. But could he change the location of the summon? It seemed possible.

A map opened in the system window with a radius of about a hundred meters, centered on his current location.

I would prefer to go to where Sir Takatou is, but...

There was no way he could tell where Yogiri was on this map. All he could do was put in coordinates. Picking the farthest possible location, he summoned himself. It happened instantly. Instead of the elven village, he was now surrounded by wild forest.

“It worked! Now I just need to continue doing this!”

He didn’t consider where he was going. All he wanted to do was get away from Carla. Heading north, he summoned himself ten more times, putting a kilometer between them.

“But how are you already here?!”

Carla was standing right in front of him. “I remembered your scent, so I just followed you.”

“What?! This plan is already a dead end?!”

This was a person capable of moving between worlds on her own power. If he was only putting a distance between them that could be measured in kilometers, he had no chance of escaping.

“Umm...if I allow you to eat me, could you perhaps give up on taking me back to your home?” Hanakawa offered as a compromise. If this mysterious girl brought him back to her home, that would truly be the end of him. He wouldn’t mind a bit of pain if he could avoid that.

“This world smells a bit off,” she answered. “I couldn’t relax and eat here.”

“Huh? Do you perhaps mean there is someone in this world who is even stronger than you?”

“People are all gathering here. I think my place is actually a lot safer.”

“Are you serious?!”

“Why would I lie?”

“Uhh...” Though it was just a hunch, Hanakawa had a feeling that such a powerful being would have no reason to lie to him. In that case, this world was truly in danger. “Even so, I don’t think it would be possible for me to fit in that bag...” He looked again at the bag. There was no way he could fit inside.

Carla thought for a moment. “If I eat half of you, the rest will fit.”

“If you put me in the bag in that state, I won’t be able to heal and will almost certainly die...”

“Then what should we do?”

“What indeed. Well, actually, you said I was delicious, no? I believe indulging continuously in one flavor will spoil it for you. It is more delicious if you only eat it once in a while. So how about instead, you only come to eat me every once in a while?”

“Is that true?”

“It is!” If the conversation continued like this, he might have a chance.

The moment that thought came to him, Carla’s head dropped to the ground.

“Huh? Is this some sort of trick?”

It was so sudden, he thought at first it was something she had done intentionally. As such a powerful being, he assumed she could do bizarre things like that just to play around. But as her body was torn apart and fell to the ground, and he saw the person standing behind her, he realized he was mistaken. A woman with a sword stood there. She had been the one who had sliced Carla to pieces.

“What the hell?! One thing after another! This is too many new characters for me to keep track of!”

“I didn’t think that would work, but it looks like I managed,” the woman said offhandedly.

“I-I am most glad to hear it! But I am simply a fool with no purpose for

being here, so please allow me to take my leave!”

He couldn’t say he was saved yet. Even if the threat posed by Carla was gone, he couldn’t guarantee this woman was any less dangerous.

“Please wait,” she called out to him, stopping Hanakawa in his tracks.

“Uhh, what is it? I believe we have no relation. Though I may have had some connection to the person you just dismantled.”

“You’re an apostle, right?”

“Ah, well. I was once, yes.” He suddenly remembered the senses he had gained as an apostle. Apostles could detect each other’s presence. Judging by that sense, this woman was also an apostle.

“I am too. I’m an adventurer. My name’s Kris.”

An adventurer. Part of the system that formed the core of the Empire of Ent. The Empire had an adventurer’s guild and provided services for them.

“Ha ha, well, that is interesting. So, do you have something you need from me?”

“If you’re an apostle, you got a special power from God, right?”

“Ha ha ha ha ha...I would not call what I received something so impressive.” Getting a bad feeling, he immediately summoned himself again, throwing himself another hundred meters away. “This is dangerous! I definitely should not be involved with her—”

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A sword erupted from Hanakawa's chest.

"Oh. I feel like I've experienced this before..."

"I got an ability from the person I just cut apart. It's the ability to follow your scent and use it to teleport beside you." Kris's voice came from behind him.

"What kind of power is that?! Why is it specific to me?!"

It didn't seem he'd have any way to escape.

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Chapter 6 — Oh, Even Though I Merged It with Your Clothes, They Didn't Come Off with It

Yogiri, Tomochika, and Mokomoko waited in the elven girl Fuwat's house. They didn't know what the elves' lifestyle was here in the forest, but it appeared Fuwat lived alone. After Haruto Ootori's departure, they had nothing else to do, so they just waited for Fuwat's return.

"Okay, let's go," Fuwat said as she stepped into the house.

"Huh? What about meeting the elves?! Aren't we going to at least have some tea or something?!" Tomochika snapped out of her bored stupor and jumped to her feet. She must have been disappointed by the lack of hospitality since they had simply been told to sit there and wait.

"Don't be silly. Don't forget, humans are our enemies. We just want you to leave as soon as possible."

"You know there are elves here now. Isn't that good enough?" With no interest in elves himself, the treatment they had received didn't bother Yogiri.

"Are you having problems?!" Tomochika pleaded. "Maybe we can help you solve them! And then we can earn friendship from the elves!"

"The current issue we have is humans wandering into our forest. If you would hurry up and leave, that would solve one of our problems."

"Ugh...I guess we can't just stick around if they hate us that much."

Since they were being rushed out, Yogiri stood up. "Actually, where did Hanakawa go?" Looking around, he finally realized Hanakawa was missing.

"He split off on our way here," Tomochika replied.

"We are rather busy here, so we can't stick around to look for someone who wanders off on their own," said Fuwat.

"He tends to disappear like that, so I guess it's all right."

"That's true. He always just sort of vanishes." Since it was a pretty common occurrence, neither Yogiri nor Tomochika were particularly

concerned.

"Come on, you two. Should you not be a little worried? Or at least try looking for him?" Mokomoko urged.

"I mean, it's Hanakawa."

"He'll show up again sooner or later."

"Then let's go," Fuwat ordered. Having judged that they'd come to an agreement on Hanakawa, she led them out of the house.

Just as when they had arrived, the village was quiet. It was a small settlement in the middle of the forest, so it wasn't surprising that it wasn't tremendously lively, but there were hardly any elves walking around. In fact, there were more bug-monkeys than actual elves.

"Are there fewer elves here because there are fewer elves in general?" Normally, one would be attacked by elves the moment they set foot in the forest, but Yogiri had heard that such attacks had stopped happening recently.

"It's nothing I would discuss with a human," Fuwat replied sharply. Of course there was no reason for her to share with someone she considered an enemy that their defensive strength had dropped harshly, but the way she spoke was almost as good as a confession.

"Is it possible that me killing Izelda had this much impact on the elves?" Yogiri whispered to Mokomoko.

Izelda was an enemy they had defeated on the cruise ship. He had spread his essence through all sorts of creatures across the world. Normally, his essence kept itself hidden, and the majority of his hosts lived their whole lives not knowing they had any connection to him. But his network had spread far, so even if only the active ones had died, it would have been possible for more to awaken later on.

Yogiri had been surprised when he'd killed Izelda. He had a pretty good sense of what happened when he used his powers, and at that point it had felt like millions of people had died.

"Hm. I do not know how Izelda's scheme functioned, but if the elves were already small in number, it is possible for such a thing to happen. Even if his essence was dispersed at random, one would expect there to be some places with higher concentrations."

"I see."

There didn't seem to be much room for conversation, so they walked silently through the village. Yogiri looked around along the way to see if

there were any signs of Hanakawa, but he found none.

They left the village behind and headed into the forest. Fuwat walked without hesitation, but Yogiri immediately felt lost. Everywhere he looked seemed exactly the same. Even getting a grasp on his current location would be too much to ask for.

"If space cycles like this, how do you get out?" he asked. Beyond the hexagon formed by the giant trees, the forest looked like it continued forever. Either space was warped or the forest was like its own separate world.

"I suppose I can tell you that much," Fuwat answered. "If you follow a set path, you can escape."

"So it *is* like the Lost Woods." If that was true, then getting out without any hints would be more or less impossible.

"But shouldn't we have checked what was in the middle of the forest? It looked like something important." Tomochika was still curious.

"They said they don't want us to go there, so going just to satisfy our curiosity isn't a good idea."

They had originally been heading for the center of the forest because they had no idea how to get out. They had only come here in the first place to cross through it and reach the other side, so there was no need for them to go anywhere else.

"There were barely any events involving elves at all... Some Elven Forest," Tomochika complained.

"You think so? I thought there were quite a few."

With Fuwat at their side, their journey was surprisingly easy. She must have known the woods well. Though hard to find, there were places where the plants parted and the ground was fairly level, creating a sort of path.

"How much longer will it take us to get out?"

"We will enter the area you called the Lost Woods shortly. From there, if you follow the right path, it should take about thirty minutes."

"Oh, so it's pretty quick if you know where you're going."

"Not many people get far enough in that they get lost." Until recently, most people were intercepted shortly after entering the forest. But with so many elves suddenly dying, they weren't able to muster their usual strength.

It may be my fault, but telling them something so vague wouldn't do any good, Yogiri thought. He didn't have any proof, and it may have all been unrelated to him anyway. From Fuwat's perspective, even if he tried to

explain it, it would just come across as strange and unclear.

As Yogiri decided it wasn't worth sharing, the forest came to an end, and a clearing appeared in front of them. About ten meters wide, it was a band of empty ground.

Fuwat came to a stop, turning to look at the three of them.

"Beyond here is the Lost Woods. Make sure you follow—"

"Close behind me" was what she had likely intended to say, but she was unable to finish her sentence. Partway through, she collapsed to the ground.

"Fuwat?!" Tomochika called out in surprise.

If it had been an attack, it hadn't been aimed at the three of them, so Yogiri hadn't seen it coming. He looked around. The dense jungle made it impossible to see very far. Someone could have been hiding there, but he couldn't see them if they were.

"It was Furemaru," Mokomoko muttered, also shocked.

"What do you mean?"

"I left part of Furemaru inside her, and it took on a sharp edge, destroying her internal organs."

"Huh? Why would you do that?!" Tomochika cried.

"It wasn't me! I cannot control it right now!"

"So someone is attacking us?" Yogiri asked.

"Correct. You could call it a demonstration."

Although he had asked Mokomoko, the answer came from somewhere else. As they turned to face the source of the voice, a person appeared. Either she had just teleported in, or she had been hiding there before, invisible. Either way, she appeared in front of them quite suddenly.

Whoever she was, she wasn't human. Though humanoid in shape, she had metal skin that separated to reveal mechanical joints underneath. She was a robot, making no attempt to hide her nature. Only her head looked human, giving her an unsettling appearance.

"You two girls are holding some of the material we gave you, are you not? It is all under our control. Now then. Would you like to test which is faster? My ability to kill them or your instant death power?"

"What do you want?" Yogiri asked. If they were trying to take Tomochika and Mokomoko as hostages, they must have wanted more than to just kill them.

"I want you to hand over the fragment of the goddess you possess."

“What’s that? Are you sure you have the right person?” He had no idea what the robot was asking for. Nothing they had picked up on their journey seemed to be related to any goddess. She may have been talking about something that wasn’t a physical object, but she would need to be more specific.

“No, I am quite certain you are carrying it. I appeared here because I detected it on your person.

“If you wanted something from us, why didn’t you just ask? There was no need to threaten us.”

“I must acquire it at any cost.”

“You still could have tried talking first!” Tomochika interjected.

Now what? Yogiri considered how to proceed. He didn’t know who this robot was, but if they were going to blatantly threaten him, they weren’t really dangerous. If they tried to kill Tomochika, he could kill them first, and Mokomoko was just possessing an android, so he didn’t even have to protect her. But this newcomer seemed to have some connection to the enormous robot they had met on the train to Hanabusa. He wanted to find out why she had come here to get involved with them before he killed her.

“Mokomoko, won’t keeping Furemaru be kind of dangerous now?”

“Hmm... I thought I had thoroughly investigated its functionality, but it appears there was something like a backdoor remaining.”

With the ghost’s implied permission, Yogiri started by killing Furemaru. The dead material lost all function, collecting into a black lump and dropping to the ground by Tomochika and Mokomoko’s feet.

“What?!” The robot girl was shocked. While they had no idea what she was like on the inside, she seemed to outwardly display an awful lot of emotion.

“Oh. Even though I merged it with your clothes, they didn’t come off with it,” Mokomoko commented.

“What exactly were you hoping would happen?!”

“It all went as planned when you were in Battle Suit mode...”

“Now your threats don’t mean anything,” Yogiri said to the robot. “So let me ask you, are you a friend of the giant robot we met earlier?”

“That is correct.” The girl’s shock lasted only a brief moment, and she returned to being calm and composed almost immediately.

“So have you been watching us the whole time?” If Furemaru was under

their control, they could have used it to find the three of them anywhere.

"Of course not. We simply found what we were looking for, so we came to collect it. Your appearance was listed in our database, so I made use of what information was available."

"And that is this goddess fragment thing? Was the giant robot looking for it too? Because I'm pretty sure we don't have anything like that."

If they did, the creature from before should have noticed. So it must have been something they picked up during their journey, but what could it be? If a goddess was similar in form to a person, it might have been a body part, but he didn't remember picking up anything so gross.

"Maybe she's talking about the Philosopher's Stones?" Tomochika offered. That was the only thing they were going out of their way to collect themselves.

"That would still be strange. The giant robot didn't try to take one from the Sage back then."

And if their objective was the Philosopher's Stones, they could attack the Sages directly. But while the Aggressors were enemies of the Sages, that was only because the Sages were deployed to fight off the Aggressors that appeared.

"I do not care how you perceive the article, only that I know it exists within your bag. Hand it over."

"That's easy for you to say, but if it really is the Philosopher's Stones, I can't give them to you." Yogiri dropped his backpack to the ground and began looking through it. It was a magic item, so the inside was much bigger than the outside. It was divided into a number of sections, so he reached into the part reserved for important things. "Uhh...they're not here."

"What?! What do you mean?! You did put them in, right?!"

"Yeah. One from Sion, one from Lain, and one from Raiza. I definitely had three of them in here." The bag was built so that if you pictured the item you wanted, it would appear in your hand. The Philosopher's Stones were round stones, small enough to fit in your hand, but there was nothing like that within.

"Did someone steal them?!"

"It's possible. I can detect killing intent, but I can't detect someone trying to steal from me."

"Excuse me! All we want is the broken fragments of the goddess—"

“That’s not important right now.”

The robot girl seemed to be reaching the end of her patience, but Yogiri was far more concerned about the missing Philosopher’s Stones that they had worked so hard to obtain.

“Well, it’s just a magic item that holds a lot, so it’s not like it has much in the way of security.”

There was no function to stop someone other than the owner from retrieving items from it. Anyone could have reached in and taken them.

“What are we supposed to do, then?! Has everything we’ve done so far been pointless?!”

“Hmm. This is bad. I never considered that someone might steal them... Wait. What’s this?”

There was something besides the Stones in the important items pocket. Yogiri grabbed it. It was warm and soft and sent a shudder through him as he touched it.

“What is this thing?”

Pulling it from the bag, he looked closely at it. It looked like a kind of skin-colored sea cucumber. It was pulsing, as if alive. Faint blue lines like blood vessels were visible under its skin.

“Gross!” Tomochika cried, mirroring Yogiri’s sentiments.

“I don’t remember getting anything like this... Did someone put it in here? Or is this—”

“The fragment of the goddess! Give it to me!” The robot girl shouted.

“No.” Though it was gross and they had no idea what it was, this is what had been left there in place of their Philosopher’s Stones. He couldn’t just hand it over.

“Then I will take it from you by force!”

A roar filled the air around them. Looking up, they saw a number of huge robots floating in the sky. Somehow, they had been hiding up there.

“That first robot we met was so understanding too...”

But this new Aggressor was totally different.

Chapter 7 — Should We Really Hold On to This? Can't We Get Rid of It?

The robots hovering in the sky above them seemed to be different from the first one they had ever met. They had four arms, armored yet slender bodies, a single horn on their foreheads, and a single eye on their faces. That much was the same as the creature they had met before, but in addition, these had mechanical wings on their backs and held long cylindrical weapons in their arms.

"It looks like the last guy, plus the ability to fly?" Yogiri remarked.

It was quite an impressive sight. Identically equipped robots filled the sky above the Elven Forest. Of course they stood out and certainly would have triggered the Sage's aerial defense network, but with this many of them, it seemed the "angels" were hesitant to show themselves.

"This is probably a stupid question, but you can deal with robots, right?" Tomochika asked.

"Probably." Yogiri hadn't deluded himself into thinking his power would work on anything and everything, but since he had never had a case where it had failed, he figured it would work. "Hey," he called out to the robot girl again, "the last one we met was so afraid of me, he didn't even want to fight. Do you not know anything about me?"

"Of course we have heard about you. But what of it?" She looked down on them with a sneer. Despite her only human feature being her head, she was rather expressive for a machine. "We were already prepared to fight divine-level beings in order to retrieve the fragments of the goddess. Naturally, we have prepared enough firepower to deal with you!"

The robot lifted a hand, and a beam of light tore across the sky. Although it wasn't aimed at them, it demonstrated a tremendous amount of destructive potential. The trees along the beam's path were instantly vaporized, and huge clouds of dirt and dust were thrown up into the air. The attack turned a huge stretch of dense forest into a barren wasteland in the blink of an eye.

"Now then," she continued, "that was only a single unit's attack, and only at a single digit percentage of its output. Does that convince you? Would you like to surrender the fragment to us now?" The robot acted like she was showing off for an audience.

"You really like these demonstrations, don't you?" Yogiri commented. "But it doesn't matter what you show us; I'm not giving it to you." He looked down at the lump of warm flesh in his hands. Even though he wouldn't mind getting rid of something so gross, it was the only clue he had for the whereabouts of the missing Philosopher's Stones, so he couldn't just hand it over.

"I see. This is your final warning. You still have no intention of complying?"

"Yeah, we're good."

"All weapons, open fire! Use your maximum output! Reduce this land to ash!"

The robots hovering in the sky turned their cannons on Yogiri as one. Light began to collect at the tips of their weapons. Releasing their full power seemed like it was going to take some time, as the balls of light slowly grew in size and intensity.

"Can I ask a few questions?" Yogiri asked.

"What is it? It's too late if you want me to stop them." The robot answered as if she was taking pity on them, like she was expecting them to beg for their lives.

"I was just wondering, won't you get hit by this too?" If the previous attack had only been a tiny fraction of the weapon's output, then at full power they would probably destroy the entire Elven Forest without much trouble. That would annihilate anyone in the forest, including the robot herself.

"This is a simple communication terminal. Losing one or two of them is of no concern."

"Okay then, what about the fragment of the goddess? Won't it get destroyed too?"

"If it was so fragile as to be destroyed by the likes of these weapons, there would be no value in searching for it in the first place."

The lump of flesh must have had considerable power hidden within. *Still no idea how it ended up in our backpack,* Yogiri thought.

The killing intent grew gradually stronger. He could see it as a black haze

covering the entire area, leaving no room for escape. Although the robot girl spoke condescendingly, she had prepared a significant amount of firepower to take him down, showing just how seriously she took him. But she had misunderstood the exact threat he posed.

"Die."

With a single word, the army of giant robots vanished.

"What happened? Why did they disappear instead of falling into the forest?" Tomochika said.

"What?!" cried the robot girl. "They weren't even in this dimension..."

Yogiri figured their bodies were in another dimension and had been killed there, cutting off their connection to this world.

"Didn't anyone tell you that wouldn't work on me?" he asked.

"How?! We should be able to attack unilaterally!"

"Attacking from a place where no one can fight back isn't really fair."

"I don't know. That doesn't sound very convincing coming from you," Tomochika commented.

"Anyway, I'm not giving this to you, so let it go."

As Yogiri spoke, the robot girl suddenly collapsed. They had no idea what she had tried to do, but his power had automatically activated to kill her, so whatever she had planned must have been something potentially fatal.

"I still don't understand what that was about," Yogiri complained.

"But this is what the Aggressors are looking for, right?" Tomochika asked. "So are they going to keep coming after us?"

"Mokomoko, can you contact the first robot we met?"

"Hm. It did say it would tell us how to return home once we had the energy and coordinates. All right, I have made contact. All that is left is to await its reply." Mokomoko was capable of transmitting electromagnetic waves, so it was easy enough for her to contact the Aggressor.

"I feel kind of bad for getting Fuwat involved..." Tomochika said, looking down at the fallen elf with a sad expression. If Fuwat hadn't been trying to guide them out, this never would have happened to her.

"We had no choice," Mokomoko replied. "Our only other option was never escaping the forest."

"I won't say we didn't do *anything* wrong, but we're not the ones who killed her," Yogiri added.

"Well...even if the people around us die, all we can do is keep moving

forward."

"That sounds like it'll cause even more problems." The village already viewed humans as their enemies. Even if they tried to explain, Yogiri couldn't imagine the situation ending well.

"There is no need to worry. The elven village has also been destroyed."

"From that beam of light?"

"Yes. The Aggressors' demonstration struck the village directly." Leaving the Enju android behind, Mokomoko had flown up into the sky to survey the damage.

"Okay, then...I guess we'll have to pretend we didn't see anything!" Tomochika said.

"Precisely! That is the correct course of action for a member of the Dannoura family!"

"But her body is still right here in front of us."

Yogiri pulled a shovel from his backpack. He didn't know what kind of funeral rites elves held, but if they left Fuwat lying there, she would just be eaten by wild animals. He felt they should at least bury her.

"This would have been a lot easier with Furemaru. Maybe I shouldn't have killed it."

"No, if you had not, we would have been unable to rest easy from here on out," Mokomoko replied. "We could not have used it comfortably, so there is no need to concern yourself."

Even though they realized it was more to make themselves feel better, Yogiri and Tomochika worked together to give Fuwat a proper burial.

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After a while, an enormous robot descended from the sky.

"Long time no see."

"Allow me to preface this discussion by saying I have no connection to what just happened here."

"Starting with excuses, huh?" Tomochika commented.

"The robots that attacked us knew about me," Yogiri said.

"They must have reviewed our shared database. While we belong to the same organization, we are members of different factions."

"You decided not to fight me, but this group attacked anyway. Why?" If

he didn’t understand the cause, they might be harassed again.

“She must have thought she was capable of defeating you. In my case, I was only equipped to perform scouting operations when we first met.”

“Is this the thing you were looking for?” Yogiri asked, holding up the lump of flesh.

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"That is correct. Could I convince you to surrender it to me?"

"Not right now. Once I know what's going on, we can think about it." He knew that his answer was vague, that was all he could offer at the moment.

"Understood." The robot backed down without complaint.

"So, what exactly is this thing?"

"It is one part of a god. It is a powerful object, enough to disrupt the power balance of an entire world."

"What do you plan on doing with it? Taking over some other world?"

"I do not know what my superiors intend, but even if they do not plan on threatening other worlds with it, it is not something we can allow another world to possess."

"Sounds complicated..." Yogiri had thought it might be okay to hand the fragment over, but he had no idea what they would do with it. If it could be used to destroy other worlds, he wouldn't be able to let them have it in good conscience.

"You said that if we had the energy and coordinates, you could return us home," Mokomoko said. "We have acquired said coordinates. Would it be possible to use the energy from this fragment of the goddess?"

"While the fragment does possess an immense amount of energy, I do not know how to tap into it at this point in time."

"We don't know how we would use the Philosopher's Stones either, do we?" Yogiri said.

"I guess it was kind of strange for us to be collecting them when we don't actually know how to use them, huh?" Tomochika replied.

"I always figured we could ask a Sage." Yogiri turned to the robot. "Hey, if you can send us back to our world, I'll give you this fragment thing. Can you supply the energy?"

The robot paused, thinking for a while. *"I shall discuss the matter with my superiors. However, I believe it will take some time."*

"That's fine." They could always continue searching for Philosopher's Stones, but it would be more efficient to work on another method of getting home at the same time.

The robot lifted off, disappearing into the sky. As with when it had first arrived, it seemed to teleport away.

"So, a fragment of the goddess. I don't really want it...but what happened to our Philosopher's Stones?" Yogiri looked closely at the lump of meat. It

seemed to be alive, so he was hesitant to shove it back into the bag. That said, holding it wasn't particularly appealing either.

"Hm. Occam's Razor says that when attempting to explain something, one should avoid adding needless assumptions or conjecture. In other words, think as simply as possible," Mokomoko said.

"Meaning?"

"The Philosopher's Stones have disappeared, and that flesh has taken their place. That would mean the stones transformed into that."

"How?!" cried Tomochika.

"Such an explanation would allow us to avoid positing that some hypothetical thief took it, since I am always on guard against our surroundings," Mokomoko continued. "It is possible that there exists someone who would be capable of stealing from us without alerting me, but there would be nothing we could do against someone so capable."

"That's true," Yogiri agreed. "If someone has superpowers like that, there's nothing we could do to stop them." If the stones had been stolen, they had no way of figuring out who had done it or where they were now.

"The Philosopher Stones were round, transparent rocks," Tomochika said. "Are you saying they turn into *this* over time?"

"I don't think it has anything to do with time, since it sounds like they've been around for a while. But we were told that when a Sage dies, the stone inside their body loses its power. If the Philosopher's Stones were these fragments of the goddess in disguise, would they act like that?"

"Hmm...I give up! Thinking about it won't help." Tomochika threw in the towel. As she said, they could do nothing but speculate at the moment, which wouldn't do any good. They would need more information if they wanted to understand more about the fragments.

"So what do we do with this thing?" asked Yogiri. "Do you want to hold it, Dannoura?"

"Why me?! This is a guy's job, right?!"

"Does it matter if it's a guy or a girl holding it?" Yogiri felt she was being a little unreasonable, but pushing it on her didn't sound much better, so he ended up carrying it himself. "I don't mind carrying it, but holding it in my hands like this doesn't seem like a great way—whoa!" As he stared at the lump of flesh, it started to move. "This thing really is gross. What..."

The lump trembled and then made eye contact. Eyes had appeared and

were now looking back at him.

“Dannoura, it’s growing eyes...” Even though he called them eyes, they were really just black spots. But he just got the impression that they were used for taking in light.

“Whoa, you’re right. It’s changing shape, isn’t it?”

“It is... If that’s where the eyes are, I guess that’s its head?” The end with the eyes was growing a little bigger, while the opposite end was becoming thinner. “Should we really hold on to this? Can’t we get rid of it?”

“Of course not!” Tomochika exclaimed. “I’m not going to touch it, though!”

“Hmm...it seems to be taking on a shape similar to the initial stage of a fetus,” Mokomoko observed. “But normally, it would be much smaller.”

“If it’s a fetus, we shouldn’t leave it out in the open air like this, should we?” Yogiri replied. But they didn’t have much choice. Yogiri could only hold it in his arms, treating it like something fragile.

Chapter 8 — Why Would They Kidnap *Him*?! He's Useless!

"Where did that bastard Hanakawa go?! Did he run away?! After all I did for him!" Yoshifumi ranted.

"Did you really do that much for him? It seemed like you were neglecting him an awful lot," Rena said with a sigh.

"Leaving him alone was doing plenty for him!"

They were in the Elven Forest. They had made it there on Yoshifumi's palanquin, but with the slaves carrying it all dead, they were now forced to walk. After an attack by a mysterious woman, Hanakawa had suddenly disappeared. The events had infuriated Yoshifumi, putting him in a terrible mood.

With Hanakawa gone, there were only four of them left: the Sage, Yoshifumi; two of the Four Heavenly Kings, Rei Kushima and Rena; and the Sage candidate, Shigeto Mitadera. While his position hadn't been made clear back in the capital, it seemed the newcomer was being treated as one of Rei's subordinates.

"Hey, Shigeto! Can't you find out where Hanakawa went?!"

"I can't tell you anything about unexpected events." Shigeto's class was Master Oracle. It gave him the ability to see his destiny. However, it did not give him knowledge of anything and everything, so he couldn't find out where Hanakawa had suddenly disappeared to. To put it simply, he could only access information that would help him progress with his current path.

"Dammit! I'm not gonna let you get away with this, Hanakawa!"

"Hanakawa is too much of a coward to run away, so it could be that he was abducted," Shigeto offered.

"You mean kidnapped? Why would they kidnap *him*?! He's useless!"

Shigeto thought Yoshifumi was treating this "useless" person as awfully important, but he decided not to say anything. He was one of Yoshifumi's subordinates for now, but if he made the Sage angry, he'd be dead in an

instant. It was better to avoid speaking unnecessarily. “That weird woman attacked him. Did she take him with her?” he asked instead.

“Dammit! Why is everyone trying to make me mad?!” The woman in the black dress was still a mystery. She had suddenly appeared, attacked Hanakawa, and then left without killing him. Hanakawa had said he had no idea who she was, so they knew nothing about her. “If we don’t get the World Sword or whatever after this, the stress is going to kill me! Shigeto! We’re heading the right way, *right*?!”

“Yes. We should make it out of the Lost Woods shortly. After that, it should be a straight line to our destination.”

The Elven Forest could be broadly divided into three sections: the outer forest, the inner forest, and the center. The inner forest they were currently traveling through was an irritating place where space was warped and twisted. If one wandered in without a plan, they would walk in circles forever. But Shigeto knew the correct path thanks to his power as a Master Oracle. Even if it seemed like they were walking across the same place multiple times, if they followed the right route, they would be able to make it through.

The forest was full of huge insects that constantly attacked them, but Rei and Rena dealt with them easily enough. Rei’s class was Femme Fatale. It allowed her to seduce the opposite sex, and it worked just fine on the insects. She was able to make the male insects turn and fight the females. In cases where that wasn’t sufficient, Rena could step in. Shigeto wasn’t exactly sure what her power was, but she was incredibly strong. Even without using any special powers, her physical prowess was more than enough to fight off their attackers.

“What a pain in the ass. Hey, Rena, can’t you teleport me out of here?”

“Nope. I can only teleport to chase a fleeing opponent or show up behind someone I’m fighting against.” In short, she didn’t have much of a range.

“Useless.” Yoshifumi grudgingly continued walking.

Before long, they were out of the Lost Woods.

“We should reach the village of the elves soon,” Shigeto said. “That’s our next destination.”

“Oh, elves, huh? They’re the ones who’ve got the World Sword?”

“No, but from the village, we can take a secret path that leads into the sealed ruins. That’s the fastest path to reach it.”

“All right!” the Sage shouted. “Let’s grab some elves to take home with us, then! I’ve already got a few back home, I think. Let’s get them partners so they can start producing more!”

“Can’t we do that on our way back?” Rena asked. “Do you really want to drag them with us the whole way?”

“Oh, we don’t have anyone who can restrain them, do we? Wait, shouldn’t you be able to do something about that, Rei?”

“That’s true. I could control the men to restrain the women and send them both back to the capital.”

“Good! Let’s do that!” Yoshifumi’s mood had suddenly improved. It seemed like he had already gotten over Hanakawa’s disappearance.

Following the instructions from his Book of Prophecy, Shigeto led them on the easiest path through the forest. It was hard to tell just by looking, but there was a place where the plant life had been cut back to form something of a road. Once they reached it, it was easy to get to the village.

“This is kind of pathetic.” Whatever his expectations had been, the village itself disappointed Yoshifumi.

“I mean, it is a village in the middle of the forest,” Rena pointed out.

The sight was more or less what Shigeto had been expecting. The village was merely an assortment of crude wooden buildings.

“There must be some sort of elder around. Let’s go take him out!”

“We’ve done all the work so far. Why don’t you do something yourself for once?” Rena complained.

“Fine. I guess I’ll show off my power for a bit!”

But the Sage never had the chance to do so. In the blink of an eye, the elven village was blown away. The four of them stared, speechless. A beam of intensely hot light passed right in front of them, leaving nothing but wasteland in its wake.

“What was that?” Yoshifumi’s face was frozen in a look of blank shock.

“I have no idea...” Shigeto was equally at a loss.

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Vivian had once been extremely confident in herself thanks to the power given to her by God, but that was now long past. She was completely lost as they stood stranded in the middle of the forest.

Vivian was invincible. She could create shields that could stop any attack, and even if she died, she would come right back to life. But even though she had no fear of dying, she wasn't sure what to do. They had headed for the ruins in the center of the Elven Forest and had found them, but after being driven off by the guardians protecting it, they had been attacked by another apostle while they fled: the adventurer, Kris.

Her adventures throughout West Ent had made her infamous as a Hero. Her attack had claimed the lives of Vivian's brothers, the princes, and her bodyguard. The only survivors were Vivian, her sister, Matilda, and her servant, Maanu.

"What do I do?" Could they simply run home after making it this far? With the elves' defense being so thin, this was a once-in-a-lifetime chance. If they left now, they might never be able to make it back. The idea of returning home without anything to show for it made her pause.

But the ruins were still guarded. The trap set for them there was enough to wipe out their entourage before they could make it inside. It made sense that within the ruins lay an even more powerful form of defense.

"Vivian, just to let you know, the anti-insect incense won't last forever. We can't just stand around here indefinitely." Maanu spoke with a bitter expression, knowing how harsh her words sounded.

"Th-That's true! For now, we should continue forward! Luckily, I am invincible, so no matter what happens, I'll be fine!" If she went on alone, she likely would have been able to manage. She didn't know where the object they were looking for was, but there was no choice.

"Hold on! Are you saying you're going to go alone?!" Matilda clung to Vivian. She had discarded her usual haughty air, making no attempt to hide her fear. "You can't just leave us out here!"

They had found a place to catch their breath after escaping the ruins. The incense would protect them from the insects, but only for the time being. Their current location wasn't all that safe.

"It's better than going into the ruins, isn't it?"

"How is it better?! That murderer might show up again!"

"Should we head back and regroup?" Maanu suggested. "Honestly, I hesitate to leave everything to Vivian."

Thinking of their safety, leaving was the best plan. But it was unlikely that they would be able to organize another effort after returning. Their strongest

defender, Gale, and the princes had all been slain. While Vivian and Matilda had the right to succeed the royal family, they had never been considered for that role and therefore hadn't been educated as future rulers. And if their incense was limited, they would have to deal with the insects next time they tried traversing the forest. In short, turning back now meant giving up on the World Sword Omega Blade.

"So we'll just go home? There may be some other way for us to retake our country..." The World Sword wasn't necessarily the only way to defeat the Sage and retake their homeland, even if it was the only option they knew of at present.

"What other way would that be?! How are we supposed to fight the adventurers or the Sage?! Isn't this our last ditch effort?!" Matilda wasn't nearly as optimistic as Vivian. They had only come this far because of how much thought and effort had gone into planning the rebuilding of their country.

"Then what do you want to do?"

"Do as you wish. I'll follow you, Vivian." Maanu had been like a parent to Vivian, but as her servant, she didn't try to press her. At this point, she had no idea what was best either.

"Then...should we all go together? If we sneak into the ruins, they might not notice us."

"Th-That's right!" Matilda said. "We let our guard down the first time, but now that we know what's waiting for us, we might be able to fight it!"

"Sure. Whether we're continuing forward or heading home, we have to go to the ruins anyway," Maanu agreed.

The supplies they needed for their journey home had been left in the ruins. The servants who had been carrying them had been killed there, so their possessions had been abandoned. The three of them now had nothing on them. They wouldn't be able to make it home without those supplies.

"Okay, then take these." Vivian created two shields, giving one each to Matilda and Maanu. "They're invincible shields that can block anything!"

"I kind of wish you had given these to us earlier, but thank you," Matilda said as she took it.

Holding the shields up in front of them, they advanced carefully towards the ruins. They hadn't gone far after fleeing, so it didn't take long for them to make it back.

“How does it look?”

“Hmm...it looks like the giant golems have turned back into buildings.”

The area was filled with rows of buildings built from stones that had been piled up on top of each other. The first time around, those buildings had transformed and attacked them.

“I guess they’ll attack us if we get close to our people’s bodies,” Maanu said, holding up the Bell of Guidance. It rang faintly as she held it out towards their destination. According to the bell, the World Sword was in the large triangular structure at the center of the ruins. “If we head straight in, it’ll be the same as last time, right?”

“Let’s head to the edge instead!”

“Is it really that easy?” Last time they had strolled down the main road heading to the center of the ruins. Since that hadn’t worked, they would have to avoid it this time.

“We’ll get as close to the edge as possible.”

They moved along the boundary of the forest and ruins. Once they reached the far right side, they turned to head into the center. It might have all been meaningless, but they proceeded as slowly and stealthily as possible.

“Looks like we’re about halfway,” Matilda noted.

“It seems fine so far,” said Vivian.

“What about the supplies?” Maanu asked.

“Leave them. They’ll just be in our way if we pick them up now!”

They continued slowly. After a considerable amount of time, they made it to a point where the large triangular structure was visible to their left. To go any farther, they’d have to pass between the buildings.

“All right, carefully.”

“Yeah.”

Their steps grew even more cautious. The most they could do was run away at the first sign of something happening, but that was better than walking in without paying attention.

“The buildings here are pretty small, so maybe they won’t transform?” Vivian said.

“That’s just wishful thinking,” Matilda replied.

They could see the enormous triangular structure right in front of them now. If nothing happened, they could head straight for it—but of course, things were never that simple. The ground began to shake, and the buildings

started to tremble. The structures on either side of them began to squirm.

"We're this far; we'll just have to run!" Vivian cried.

Luckily, it seemed like the transformation would take some time. Vivian created a huge shield along with four others to function as wheels, which allowed them to operate together as a sort of simple vehicle.

"Get on!"

"This is a shield?!"

The three of them jumped on. The shields functioning as wheels began to spin, rapidly accelerating and moving them forward. In no time at all they passed through the gap between the buildings and reached the main road.

"We made it!"

"Why didn't we just do this from the start?!"

"Because I was hoping we wouldn't be noticed!"

If they had tried to charge down the main street, they might have been crushed by the giants appearing on either side of them. This had been Vivian's last desperate gambit.

"We can make it!"

There was nothing else blocking their path. All they had to do was continue forward in a straight line. The giants born from the buildings behind them gave chase, but the trio's shield-car was faster, so the creatures couldn't catch up.

"Now we just need to get—huh?" Vivian doubted her eyes. The huge triangular structure they were heading for began to shake. "Is that going to transform too?!" she wailed.

Maybe they should have seen it coming. The structure began to change shape. It wasn't hard to believe it could become a giant as well, but they hadn't expected it. They seemed to be out of options.

"The Bell of Guidance is pointing under it!" Maanu moved the bell around. Aiming the bell at the structure made it ring, but pointing it down made it ring even louder.

"So it's underground?!" Matilda cried.

"We're going in!"

Without getting closer, they couldn't see another way, so Vivian continued onward. The structure sprouted arms and legs, lifting itself to its feet. It was so large that they had to look up to see it as it took on a shape that could only be called titanic.

“There it is!” At the titan’s feet was a hole that looked tiny in comparison. The titan lifted a foot, intending to crush them, but it was their best chance.

“Giant Chainsaw Shield!”

Vivian lifted a hand above her head, and an enormous shield appeared. She heaved it forward, where it struck the monstrous foot that was still on the ground. She knew her shields couldn’t damage the giant, but she figured if she threw something heavy enough, it would have at least a minimal impact. As she had hoped, it was enough to throw the titan off balance, sending it hurtling to the ground.

“Hey! It’s falling towards us!” Matilda shouted again.

Vivian hurriedly changed direction, accelerating as fast as possible to avoid the falling monster. It hit the ground, crushing the ruins beneath it and launching the shield-car briefly into the air.

“Now’s our chance! We can make it!”

“If you could do this from the start, couldn’t you have saved everybody?!”

“I didn’t think about it until now!”

Vivian pointed the shield-car towards the underground entrance. The greatest obstacle, the titan, had yet to move after falling. The pursuing giants had also pulled back. There was nothing left in their way.

But something entirely unexpected hit them instead.

A beam of white-hot light filled Vivian’s vision.

Chapter 9 — If You Think I'm Nothing but a Cute Princess, You're In for a Rude Awakening!

Vivian's mind was sent reeling within the pure white that had filled the world in front of her eyes, the unbelievably hot light incinerating her body in an instant. The next thing she knew, she was lying on ground that had been melted down to glass. Though she had been totally annihilated, her power had activated to automatically revive her.

"What the..."

Lifting herself up to a seated position, she looked around. A trench of melted earth stretched out in either direction, indicating where the light had passed. Nothing was left in its path. The ruins, the guardian giants, and even the stone titan were all gone. The light had annihilated absolutely everything in front of it. Of course, this had been caused by the beam of light fired by the Aggressors as a demonstration for Yogiri, but Vivian had no way of knowing that.

"No way..." Two shields lay on the ground beside her. They were the invincible shields capable of blocking any attack, which she had given to Maanu and Matilda. Although they looked worn out, they were still intact. But all that remained were the shields, without a trace of the people they were intended to protect. Even the oblivious Vivian felt rattled upon seeing that.

After sitting in shock for a while, she finally staggered to her feet. She had survived, so she needed to complete their mission: find the World Sword, defeat the Sage, and rebuild their country. She was now the only one left who could accomplish that.

Vivian stumbled over to the opening in the ground. The earth around it had melted away, but the opening was clear of debris. She jumped inside without a moment's hesitation. The fall was enough to kill an ordinary human, so Vivian created shields under her feet to absorb the shock of the

landing.

"Light Shield." She created a glowing shield to light up the darkness around her. "Ha ha...I can do basically anything, can't I?"

If she had used her power properly, maybe everyone else would still be alive. But there was no point in wallowing in regret now.

The shield illuminated a stone corridor. Even from where she was standing, she could see a number of places where the path branched off. It seemed like it was a labyrinth of sorts.

"Search Shield."

A large shield with an arrow drawn on it appeared. She had tried to make a shield that would help her find what she was looking for, but she was surprised when it actually worked.

"Do you know where the World Sword is?"

She held the object level with the ground, and it spun for a while before stopping. That was the direction she would have to go in.

As she stepped forward to follow the path indicated by the arrow, spears shot out from the walls to impale her. Vivian blocked them, and acid poured down from the ceiling as she continued. Then the floor exploded, and a giant iron ball appeared from behind to crush her. She was able to block them all with her shields, but she was starting to get tired of it.

"Auto Shield."

Numerous shields appeared, floating in the air around her. They would move on their own to protect her. There were plenty of traps set up to stop intruders, but the shields blocked them all.

Following the path indicated by the Search Shield, it didn't take long for her to reach her destination. There was an altar there, an old pedestal that had a sword embedded in it. It had been plunged so deep into the stone that only the hilt and guard were visible, the entire body of the blade hidden within.

"If I break the seal, I become the owner, right?"

She didn't know how to go about doing that and decided to try pulling out the sword to start with. Standing on the pedestal, she grabbed the hilt and slowly tried pulling it out. It came free disappointingly easily.

"Huh? That's it? I guess it's easy if it recognizes you as its wielder... Wait! Why is it so rusty?!"

The blade was covered in rust. On top of that, she couldn't feel any power coming from the weapon. It seemed like nothing more than a lump of old

metal.

"What?! Come on! What is this?! We came all the way here for this?!"

Thinking there must be some sort of mistake, Vivian inspected the blade from a variety of angles, but no matter how she looked at it, it was just a rusty blade. How could something like this defeat a Sage? She was at a total loss.

"Oh? Looks like someone's already here. Guess we made it just in time."

She heard a man's voice behind her. Turning around, she saw a group of people walk into the chamber. "Who are you?!"

"Heh, come on now. Don't you recognize your own emperor? What kind of citizen are you?"

"Yoshifumi, you kill most people who see your face. There's no way she'd recognize you," one of the women accompanying him sighed.

"Dammit! That makes this way too boring. I wanted her to be scared."

The speaker was a man with a studded leather jacket, looking like no more than a common street thug. It seemed he was the emperor of Ent, the Sage Yoshifumi.

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Since the elven village had been destroyed, the hidden passageway was easy to find. With the buildings and ground melted away, the underground route became clearly visible. Following the secret passage from the remains of the village, they arrived in a small chamber. Magical lights were set into the walls, and a large pedestal sat in the middle of the room.

Beside the pedestal was a young girl surrounded by floating shields. Yoshifumi had brought his group here after hearing the royal family was heading into the Elven Forest, so it was possible she was of royal descent. She had a sword in her hand. It must have been the World Sword. Despite holding what should have been a powerful relic, she seemed somehow perplexed but only for an instant. As Yoshifumi entered the room, she turned to face him.

"An emperor introducing himself sounds dumb, but I guess I have to. I'm Yoshifumi, the emperor of Ent. Normally, I execute anyone who sees my face, but since you're royalty, I'll give you special permission to look at me."

His face was unknown to the citizens of the empire. It was considered an act of disrespect by law for ordinary civilians to look at his face and know

who he was, so anyone who saw him was given the death penalty. It's what allowed him to hang around the bars of the city acting like an ordinary gangster.

"You are Yoshifumi?!"

"Yep. And that's the World Sword? How is that hunk of garbage supposed to beat me?"

The weapon was basically falling apart. The hilt and guard were in good condition, but the blade was in a pathetic state. The entire body was rusted and chipped all over. It wouldn't have been a surprise if it had snapped in two.

Shigeto, however, was fully aware that the sword had no power in its current state.

"How should I know?" the girl responded. "But it must have some sort of power! It's called the World Sword, after all!" She was clearly also confused by the state of the sword, but even so, she brandished it at him. "Now, World Sword Omega Blade, reveal your true power and slay this wicked usurper who calls himself a Sage!" she shouted, but the weapon didn't respond.

"So?" Yoshifumi smirked.

"I have no idea..." She appeared unsure of what to do next.

"Hey, Shigeto, is that really the World Sword?"

"The Book of Prophecy says this is the place."

"Hm. I guess your book couldn't tell if something went wrong, right?"

"Correct. It is not omnipotent by any stretch."

The Book of Prophecy provided information needed to proceed through any sequence of events, but if something were to happen to change the nature of an event later on, the prophecy had no way of updating itself to deal with new developments.

"So someone probably switched it out," Yoshifumi said. "Well, that's fine." Considering his personality, it wouldn't have been strange for him to lose his temper upon finding out the World Sword wasn't here after traveling so far to find it. But as if he had lost interest in the weapon entirely, he turned his attention to the girl standing before them.

Things are going well so far. All that's left is to figure out how to get my hands on it... Shigeto was relieved. He wasn't being manipulated by Yoshifumi. At most, he was under Rei's control, so he was capable of hiding information from the Sage. The blade in the stranger's hands was a vessel

needed to recreate the true form of the World Sword Omega Blade.

"By the way, what's your name?" Yoshifumi asked.

"Why would I tell the likes of you?!"

"It's probably Vivian," Rena said offhandedly.

"What?!"

Judging from her shock, the guess had been accurate. She tried to hide it, but Shigeto knew Rena was capable of reading people's minds. It wasn't like she could hear everyone's voices around her, though. She could only read the minds of people she was looking directly at. So Shigeto had done everything in his power to avoid getting involved with her. He had to make sure she didn't reveal his secret plan. Luckily, she didn't seem to have any interest whatsoever in him, so they hadn't even spoken yet.

"I see. Princess Vivian, is it? What a good girl, coming all the way out here thinking you could find a way to beat me!"

"Dammit! Stop mocking me! Fine! I don't need the World Sword anyway!" She threw aside the old blade.

"Oh, you look pretty fired up! Bring it on, then. But before the last boss, why don't you see if you can take on the mid-boss?"

"What? You're going to make me do it?" Rena complained.

"I don't want to waste my time if it's gonna be a boring fight."

"Fine." Rena reluctantly stepped forward as Yoshifumi stepped back, Rei and Shigeto taking up spots beside him.

"If you think I'm nothing but a cute princess, you're in for a rude awakening!" Vivian declared.

"I guess she has the power to summon shields?"

"So what if you know?! Take this! Shield Pummeling!" A large number of tiny shields appeared in the air and rushed at Rena, more like bullets than anything else. "Chainsaw Shield! Sword Shield! Spike Shield!" With a roar, shields with chainsaws, swords, and spikes on them followed. "Thunder Shield! Fire Shield! Ice Shield!" The shields around her began to give off sparks of lightning, balls of fire, and waves of cold. It seemed that basically anything was possible for her.

Rena made no effort to defend herself, and they all struck her dead on.

"Take that! After those—"

"Looks like your attack power is pretty low." Rena was unharmed.

"No way..."

“Okay, it’s my turn.”

Rena leaped forward, throwing a kick at Vivian. The shields hovering around the princess moved of their own accord to intercept the attack.

“Ha! I can block any attack!”

“Then what about this?”

A pop sounded from Vivian’s stomach.

“Huh?”

She looked down to see herself drenched in blood. Her stomach had exploded outwards, spilling her guts on the ground.

“You have high resistance levels, but it doesn’t look like you can defend against everything perfectly.”

“No way... What did you do?” Vivian collapsed, the shields around her following suit.

“What exactly is Rena’s power?” Shigeto muttered.

“She doesn’t have anything special,” Yoshifumi explained. “She’s just really strong.”

Shigeto recalled the time he had lost to her. A single kick from her had left him on death’s doorstep.

“But...I cannot die!” Vivian jumped back to her feet. Not only had her stomach returned to normal, even her clothes were undamaged.

“Yoshifumi, what am I supposed to do about this?” Rena complained. “It’ll go on forever.”

Vivian seemed to have an inexhaustible ability to revive herself. Even if they could kill her, it wouldn’t solve anything for long.

“I guess I got no choice. Looks like the mid-boss battle is a draw.”

As Rena stepped back, Yoshifumi stepped forward, finally ready to join the fight himself.

Chapter 10 — Interlude: Recruiting God Slayers. Reward: Ten Quadrillion Credits.

One of Malnarilna's angels stood on the summit of a mountain. There wasn't anything particularly special about the place, only that it offered the wide open area she needed. The angels had begun taking action according to their own plans. They were all equally ranked, so with Malnarilna no longer there to offer them leadership, there was no hierarchy among them.

"That should be good." The angel, looking like a young child, had drawn an enormous figure into the field that lay on the summit of the mountain. The lines glowing with magical energy connected into a complex geometric design, forming a magic circle. But this particular design didn't hold any power of its own. It was just a sign.

"Assassins, huh? How much do we even pay them?"

They were looking for assassins from other worlds. There was no point in looking for someone who wasn't already fairly strong. They needed someone as powerful as possible who could kill Yogiri Takatou without fail.

Yogiri had killed Malnarilna. The twin goddesses may have let their guard down against him because he was a mere human, but he had still been capable of slaying them. At the very least, they needed someone as powerful as a god to match him.

"Hmm...we don't have any good connections or anything, so I don't know what the going rate is."

The angel accessed the Upper Information Layer. It was a layer that existed above the material world, loosely connecting numerous lower-level worlds beneath it. The angel accessed the segment group that included her own world and took a look at the forums. A brief glance showed that, as expected, there were no threads blatantly advertising the services of an assassin. So she decided to start a thread herself.

Recruiting God Slayers. Reward: Ten Quadrillion Credits.

With no idea how much was an acceptable offer, she set the reward fairly

high. It wasn't her money, so she had no inhibitions about spending it. She didn't know how difficult the job would be either, so she just asked for anyone capable of killing gods.

She received two responses almost immediately. She waited a little while longer, but no other responses came. Perhaps the reward was so great as to make others suspicious.

The angel reviewed the two respondents with a frown. They were rather awful individuals. The laws and values of individuals varied from world to world, so there was no such thing as a universal set of rules. But there were those whose behavior was such that they wouldn't be accepted anywhere. People like that were forbidden from entering any world.

These two were exactly that. The first was a serial killer of gods who traveled between worlds and murdered the gods that ruled them. His objective was unclear, but he was terrifyingly powerful and had been banned from entering all worlds ever since rising to fame.

The other option was a group of "pirates." Rather than stalking the seas of any individual world, they traveled through the "sea" between worlds, which housed the numerous Celestial Foundations, laying waste to worlds wherever they went. Naturally, they were abhorred by those who inhabited the Celestial Foundations and so were forbidden from entering other worlds through official channels. This world was well aware of their notoriety and had denied them entry in the past.

"What am I supposed to do now? Well, it's probably fine!"

Letting people like that into the world would be a huge disaster. Under normal circumstances, it would never even be considered. But the angel was desperate. She couldn't care less what happened to the world now that Malnarilna was gone.

She accepted both offers.

Before long, something had appeared at the center of the magic circle she had drawn. A young man with a white coat and a friendly face stood there. She had given the would-be assassins permission to enter the world, designating the circle she had drawn as their point of entry.

"Hello! My name is Takumi. Nice to meet you!"

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The serial killer was the first to arrive.

“Hello. I am an angel of Malnarilna. I don’t really have a name.”

“I see. Okay, see you later!” Takumi began walking away.

“Hold on!” The angel hurriedly stopped him. She hadn’t told him any of the details yet.

“Oh, sorry! I’ll hear you out. What did you want?”

She gave him the name and description of his target as well as the information she had regarding his powers and whereabouts.

“The reward will go to whoever kills him. One other group has been recruited to help take him out, so whoever gets him first wins, okay?”

“All right.”

“What’s wrong? You don’t seem very motivated.” The angel felt uneasy about how curt the boy was acting.

“Yeah, I was really only interested in getting into this world, so when I saw the request, I jumped at the chance! I’m not really all that drawn to the money.”

“I see. Well, I guess that’s okay.” The reward would only be paid if he succeeded, so this was just one of the angel’s attempts. There was no point in getting hung up on the first person who arrived, so she decided to put her hopes on the next option.

“It’s okay?”

“Yes. I’m sure you’ll cause all sorts of trouble in this world. It’s possible you’ll get the target caught up in it by accident.”

“Ah, I get it. I was just trying to tease you a bit, but now I feel kind of bad. Okay, if I see him, I’ll kill him for you.”

“Thank you.”

Takumi walked down the mountain. After a while, something else appeared in the magic circle. It was a group of a few dozen...things. An enormous lump of flesh. A doll made from a series of complex, interwoven pipes. A tube made entirely of eyeballs. A humanoid shape made from red thread. They were all mind-boggling creatures.

The angel immediately regretted letting them in. Even if she didn’t care what happened to this world, she felt it had been the wrong call to allow this group through.

From among the crowd of monsters, a single figure stepped forward. Compared to the others, he was the most human. In shape, he seemed like an

ordinary person, but he was solid black. It was like his whole body was a window into a pitch dark void, like he absorbed any and all light that touched him, or like he was a shadow that had simply stood up. The angel felt repulsed by him. He gave off a much more sinister air than the other monsters standing behind him. His presence was overwhelming, to the point where she had to assume he was the leader.

"A pleasure to meet you. Thank you for your request." The shadow spoke in a flat, monotonous voice.

"Oh, uhh, nice to meet you. You're the 'pirates,' right? Do you normally take requests like this?"

"Ordinarily, we only plunder and pillage like pirates, but the reward you offered was too much to ignore."

The credits they used as currency didn't have a physical form, so there was no way to steal them. They only existed while the trade was occurring. So even if the pirates had the power to destroy this world, they had no way of stealing Malnarilna's wealth.

"Okay then, this is your target." The angel gave the pirates the information she had on Yogiri Takatou.

"Thank you. Do you mind if we make use of the tag here?" He was referring to the magic circle she had drawn. It existed only to be a searchable point from outside the world.

"Oh, sure. I don't mind, but may I ask why?"

"We are pirates. A cabal of ruffians. There are far more of us than you see here."

A shadow suddenly covered the mountain, prompting the angel to look up. Large ships had appeared above them. One by one, enormous vessels built for crossing the "sea" between worlds filled the sky.

"Uhh, do you really need this many people?" She didn't know how strong they were, but they were only hunting a single human boy. She found it hard to believe they would need this much firepower.

"The reward is ten quadrillion credits. For such a price, we will not underestimate the task." The shadow spoke as expressionless as ever, but somehow, it felt to the angel like he was laughing.

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“In the world of the gods, it’s eat or be eaten. There are no rules, only the will of the strong. But still, don’t you think it’s a bit immature for a parent to interfere in their child’s affairs?”

In one of the courtyards of the Heavenly Throne, the vibrantly colored array of buildings that served as the control room for the world, Kouryu faced off against someone. A goddess overflowing with a sublime divinity stood there with a motherly smile on her face. It was only natural that the goddess who had given birth to Malnarilna was even greater than they were, so Kouryu, who wouldn’t have been able to handle one of the twins alone, stood no chance against her. This was a dangerous situation for him, but all he could do was complain sarcastically.

“I can’t say I disagree. It is rather pathetic for me to come and clean up after my daughters, even after they’ve been independent for so long.”

Malnarilna’s angels had called her there. Obtaining permission to enter this world had never been especially difficult. Aside from a few specific examples, almost anyone could come and go as they wished.

“Is there some way we can compromise here? Would you be happy if I let you kill me?”

“Well, death isn’t a big deal to people like us.” She figured Malnarilna would come back to life sooner or later as well and didn’t seem to think too much of the ordeal. “I only came here because I was called. No matter what you did to kill them, I can only blame them for losing.”

“Then...” *Please go home*, he wanted to say. But of course, things were never that easy.

“But I suppose I can’t ignore the request of the angels they created.”

“What exactly is that?”

“They want me to destroy the world itself.”

“Well, that’s kind of crazy.”

She couldn’t possibly answer a request like that.

“It’s their final option if the angels fail to defeat a certain someone.”

“Are they looking for revenge against me as well?” Kouryu asked.

“No, they were born to support the gods. They wouldn’t even consider harming one.” While it was acceptable for a god to be slain by another god, they couldn’t let it go if a god were slain by a mere human.

“Hmm...speaking of which, are you aware he killed one of the twins?”

“‘He’? Ah, you mean *him*?” Normally, with such vague terms, she would

have no way of knowing who Kouryu was referring to. But for those who knew of the individual, the general atmosphere was enough to indicate who the pair were referring to. Spelling it out wasn't necessary. "No way... Why is he here?!"

"About half of this world is ruled over by people calling themselves Sages." Kouryu gave her a rough explanation of how Yogiri Takatou had been summoned there and was now traveling across the world.

"Even knowing about him is a considerable risk. The chance of encountering him is so infinitesimally small, I thought there were greater merits in not knowing he even existed..."

If they knew he existed, they might think about him. If they thought about him, they might think their powers as gods would be enough to deal with him. And then what? If they tried to harm him with their powers, they would be killed instantly. So the goddess hadn't told Malnarilna anything about him.

"Ah! I met him as well!" Kouryu exclaimed as if just remembering.

"I just realized, I have urgent business elsewhere!" With that, the goddess vanished. There was no way to interpret her departure as anything other than fleeing in fear, but she didn't have time to make a more elegant retreat.

"I feel bad for you, Yogiri, but I'll have to wait a little longer before telling you how to get home."

The state of the world was in peril, to the point where Kouryu didn't feel that his power alone would be enough to manage. But if he left Yogiri to his own devices, the boy would likely encounter and deal with many of those problems on his own. Kouryu had already run into Yogiri himself, so he figured he might as well use him as much as he could.

ACT 2

Chapter 11 — After All He's Been Through, He's Probably Still Alive Somehow

"I think it's getting bigger."

Yogiri was holding the mysterious lump of flesh that had taken the place of their Philosopher's Stones. Mokomoko had suggested the stones had transformed into this thing, but Yogiri wasn't convinced. There were no signs that pointed to this thing having once been a collection of round, transparent stones.

"Hm. It appears it is growing arms and legs," Mokomoko observed. "It does indeed seem to be some sort of fetus."

"Are we sure I can't just put it back in the backpack?"

"Of course you can't," Tomochika replied like it was obvious despite still refusing to hold it herself.

"How long do I have to hold on to this thing?"

The robot that had attacked them earlier had said the fragment of the goddess wouldn't be damaged by most attacks. But while it didn't feel all that delicate, it seemed wrong to leave something so warm to the touch and with such soft skin lying on the ground. He wanted to put it on a soft blanket or something.

"Let's find somewhere we can relax for a bit," Tomochika suggested.

"But the elven village was destroyed," said Mokomoko.

"In that case, I guess we have to head for those ruins after all," Yogiri replied.

They were surrounded by forest, so there weren't any other options. Mokomoko left the Enju robot behind briefly and headed up into the sky to scout out the terrain, returning quickly to give her report.

"The ruins lie along this burned out stretch of land. They have been partially destroyed, but some of the buildings survived."

“Then let’s go. Would you mind swapping for a bit, Dannoura?”

“Uhh...I really don’t want it to bite me...”

“What do you mean? Oh, it has a mouth now.” They had guessed the place where the eyes were was its head, and now there were ears, a nose, and a mouth there as well. “It doesn’t look like it has teeth yet.”

But Tomochika’s concern wasn’t entirely unfounded. The lump of flesh was slowly taking on the form of an actual living thing. While it wasn’t responding to them yet, some sort of consciousness could awaken sooner or later. There was no guarantee it wouldn’t attack them when that happened, so the safest option was to leave it with Yogiri, who could kill it instantly if the worst were to happen.

“Okay, let’s head for the ruins for now,” he agreed.

Yogiri and Tomochika followed the guardian spirit as she led the way in the android’s body. Thanks to the burned out stretch of land, there were no obstacles in their path. It was an incredibly easy walk, and the ruins came into view in no time.

“Looks like there’s a lot of damage here too,” Yogiri observed, “though it doesn’t seem like anyone was living here before.”

Buildings built from piled up stones stood in lines. They were so old, it seemed like calling them ruins had been correct. They were laid out in a grid through which the beam of light had carved a diagonal line. The path the light had traveled was empty, just like the road they had walked to get there.

“There was a huge pyramid here before, right?” Tomochika asked.

“There was, but I guess the beam destroyed it.”

“That might be a problem if it was part of some important event...”

If there was something here, Yogiri expected it would have been at the enormous structure in the center of the ruins. But they hadn’t come to explore the ruins themselves, so it didn’t matter that it was gone.

“Let’s just go into one of the houses.”

“If no one lives here, they might not have been made for people to rest in.”

Despite Tomochika’s doubts, their only option was to go and see for themselves. As they approached the closest building, the ground beneath them began to shake.

“An earthquake?” Tomochika asked, confused.

The building in front of them started shaking as well. It expanded upward,

growing hands and legs, taking on the form of a giant person.

"Die."

At Yogiri's command, the building froze. And not just the building in front of them. The other structures in the ruins had frozen in various states of transformation.

"Mokomoko," Tomochika said.

"Yes?"

"You said something about ancient martial arts being unbeatable in another world, right?"

"I did."

"But martial arts would be useless against things like those!"

"Hmm. Whether it's giant centipedes or dragons, I believe there would be some way we could manage as long as they are alive."

"Really?"

"Either way, the Dannoura Way continuously evolves! Depending on the situation, it must find a way to grow!"

"Please don't throw your successors into the deep end alone like that!"

Yogiri had killed the transforming buildings after sensing the killing intent coming from them. Some of them were still mostly building-shaped. They didn't know how long a "dead" building would hold, but it was probably enough for a short stay.

"This one looks usable," he noted, finding one that had barely transformed.

They poked their heads inside and found a stone table and chairs fixed to the floor. Even though they were buildings made to transform into giants, they were still furnished to serve as shelters.

"Finally, we have a roof!" Tomochika exclaimed.

"Much better than being out in the jungle. Dannoura, could you get the blanket out?"

At Yogiri's request, Tomochika pulled a blanket from his backpack. They spread it out on the ground and sat down. Yogiri was finally able to lay his charge down.

"Looks like it's a girl," he observed.

"You don't have to stare at it so closely!"

By now, the thing was looking like a newborn baby.

"We should have abandoned it when it was just a lump of meat..." Yogiri

began to regret holding on to it. He couldn't help but feel like things were about to get more complicated.

"We can't get rid of it now," Tomochika protested. "It's clearly a baby..."

"They said it was a fragment of the goddess, right? If it's just a fragment, does that mean there are more out there?"

"I see it has no navel," Mokomoko said. The baby's stomach was perfectly flat, lacking the belly button a human would possess. But that was the only thing that seemed out of place. "Hm. It reminds me of an old theological dispute. Did the first man created by God have a navel? Something like that."

"Sounds like a pointless argument to me."

"Is it okay to leave it naked like this?" Yogiri asked.

"Maybe we should put a diaper on it or something."

"If this is actually like a human baby, there's nothing we can really do, is there?"

"You mean to take care of it?"

"We would need to feed it and change its diapers, right? Are you good at that, Dannoura?"

"Uhh, I was the youngest child, so I have no experience with stuff like that. But what about Mokomoko? If you're my ancestor, you must have had children of your own!"

"Indeed! Such a conclusion should be obvious! But I have no experience raising children!"

"Don't sound so proud of that!"

"We employed a wet nurse. After raising the child for a short time, I went straight back to training!"

"So you're useless after all! What kind of guardian spirit are you?!"

Yogiri pulled out some cloth from their backpack and wrapped the baby in it. He didn't know if the improvised swaddle was good enough, but it felt better than doing nothing at all.

"Is it asleep?"

"It seems alive, at least."

It was breathing, it had a pulse, and its complexion looked healthy. But it hadn't cried or opened its eyes once. The eyes that had appeared at first had been bare before, but at some point it had developed eyelids over them.

"Well, this is a problem. I never imagined we'd end up in a situation like

this," Yogiri said.

"We can't just abandon it."

"And there are no longer others around that might take care of it for us," Mokomoko added.

From Yogiri's perspective, it was a baby that had suddenly been dropped into his lap. If it was possible to hand it off to someone else, he'd be more than happy to do so.

"Anyway, we made it here. Now what?"

"Hm. It feels like we are back at the starting line," Mokomoko said.

"Maybe we should have asked the elves how to get out of the Lost Woods ourselves."

"I doubt they would have told us. They would not have wanted humans coming and going as they pleased."

If the elves had been willing to tell them how to get out, Fuwat probably wouldn't have come to guide them in the first place.

"I guess we know three ways out," Yogiri mused. "One is to follow the correct path through the Lost Woods, but that seems like it's going to be impossible."

"The elven village was destroyed, but that does not necessarily mean all of the elves were slain," Mokomoko said.

"We can look for survivors, but I'm not too hopeful." If they found any, they might be able to get them to cooperate, but Yogiri found it hard to imagine an elf would willingly help a group of humans, considering how hostile they had been. "The second option is to fly out, but we can't fly. So the fastest way is probably the third option: killing the forest itself."

The Lost Woods warped the space around them, but it seemed to rely on the trees to accomplish that. If they destroyed a sizable portion of the forest, the spell should be rendered powerless.

"I don't really want to use my power on such a big scale if I can help it, though. Using it on something I don't understand that well is kind of difficult."

When his target was on the level of a forest, limiting the area of the effect was challenging. If things went poorly, it could have effects that spanned the entire world.

"Umm, maybe it's weird to bring this up now," Tomochika said hesitantly, "but what happened to Hanakawa?"

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“Oh, right.”

The elven village had been destroyed, and that was where they had last seen him. If he had stayed there, he would have been erased along with it. Although Hanakawa possessed healing magic, the beam of light had incinerated everything in an instant. If it had struck him, he would have been killed immediately.

“After all he’s been through, he’s probably still alive somehow.” Yogiri felt bad for him for a moment, but he found it hard to believe Hanakawa would actually die.

“So there’s no point in worrying!” Tomochika concluded. She had been the one to bring it up, yet she dropped the topic just as fast.

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“Suppose I were a character in a manga or an anime. Even if I were suddenly impaled through the chest, and my life were in obvious danger, I feel like no one would be the slightest bit concerned about my well-being! Of course, there is the fact that I am still alive!”

The sword had cut straight through Hanakawa’s back, the tip emerging from his chest. But it wasn’t enough to kill him. If he didn’t die instantly and could stay conscious, as long as he had magical energy to spare, he could heal any injury easily.

After being stabbed, he had dropped to the ground, pretending to be dead. Once his assailant had stepped away, he waited for a considerable amount of time. After a healthy amount of distance was between them, he slowly got to his feet and looked around.

He was alone. The only person nearby was Carla, lying in pieces on the ground somewhere.

“Perhaps it is true that I am most resilient, but I have no means with which to win in combat! Feigning death is truly the best solution!”

He had been impaled, so it wasn’t hard to assume it had been a fatal wound. If he hadn’t used his healing magic right away, he probably would have been dead within minutes.

“Hmm. Given how she cut Lady Carla to pieces, I thought she was simply a mass murderer with bizarre tastes, but...”

The adventurer named Kris had left Hanakawa intact. Perhaps satisfied

after stabbing him once, she had left him alone after that.

"No matter. I have no means of discovering her motives, nor do I care! For now, I have been saved, so I must return to the elven village—"

The moment he thought that, a huge roar shook the forest. He didn't know what had happened, but his instincts told him it was something on the level of a natural disaster.

"That was from the direction of the elven village, if I recall..." He immediately gave up on going back. "What shall I do next? I suspect running into Sir Yoshifumi would end poorly."

It wasn't like he had split off from Yoshifumi intentionally, but the Sage didn't know that. He would probably assume Hanakawa had run away, and he wouldn't forgive him for it.

"As such, it seems the empire is now off limits to me."

The area around the empire was all under observation by one of Yoshifumi's Four Heavenly Kings, Abby. If he got close, she would know his location in an instant.

"In that case, I should leave this island behind, but the port is in the capital. If he is truly determined, there is no way I could sneak through without catching Sir Yoshifumi's attention."

Yoshifumi was both the emperor and a Sage. He could do any crazy thing he wished on this island. He could keep the entire area under surveillance twenty-four hours a day if he so chose.

"Hmm...is there some answer using my summoning power?"

He no longer felt the need for something as unbelievable as a beautiful young girl who would love him back. He wondered if he could summon someone who would look even a little favorably on him and help him out of this situation instead.

"Well, I might as well begin looking at the search window. I might come up with a good idea."

Hanakawa opened the system window and looked at his skill list. He went to select the "Summon Anything" skill, but it wasn't there.

"Hm? Should it not be at the very bottom?" Looking over the skill list repeatedly, he couldn't find the summoning skill anywhere. "What is going on? Did it really disappear with Malnarilna's death?"

"Not at all. My power as an apostle is to randomly steal powers from the people I cut."

Hanakawa turned to face the source of the voice to find Kris standing behind him.

“Why are you here?! Didn’t you leave?!” Hanakawa recalled she had obtained the power to use his scent to teleport to him.

“Yes, after hitting you once, I acquired a skill, so I thought that was enough.”

“Then why did you return?! You should have no further use for me!”

“That’s true. I kind of figured anything else I got from you would be useless.”

“It is a little irritating to be called useless, but all I have left is healing skills! I don’t possess anything that special! Or what, do you intend to finish me off?!”

“I don’t really care about your healing skills or whether you’re alive or dead, but ever since killing that last person, my tastes have changed a bit.”

“What?!” Hanakawa instinctively began to back away.

“I just thought you looked kind of tasty.”

“Nothing about me has changed in the least! Please, spare me!”

Hanakawa was far from being out of danger.

Chapter 12 — Wait, Would I Not Also Die in That Case?

“You are saying you want to eat me, correct?” Hanakawa asked the hero.

“Yeah. You look tasty, but I don’t know how I feel about eating a person.”

“Please treasure that emotion! That is an invaluable part of the human experience!” At the very least, it didn’t seem she was hungry enough to leap forward and devour him instantly.

“I guess I should be more careful with what abilities I steal. I can’t control skills that are always active.”

“Ah. Well. What is it you intend with me, then? I am not quite sure what your objective is.”

“Objective?” Kris sank into thought. Hanakawa could hardly believe it. She didn’t even have a clear reason for coming back here.

What, are you going to kill me without having a reason to do so?! He didn’t voice his thoughts, though. His opponent was overwhelmingly powerful. Her breath alone would be enough to blow him away.

“Oh, sorry. I got a bit confused. After taking in so many skills from that woman earlier, my head’s been spinning a bit.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“Anyway, my objective... I want to live as easy a life as possible.”

“Err, I was not asking about your overall life objective.”

“But that doesn’t mean I just want to be like those rotten old nobles and spend each day sitting on a pile of wealth.”

“That sounds like an enviable enough position to me.”

“If I can use the powers I have to the fullest, I thought that might make for a happier life. I was always kind of athletic, and I can learn most things just by watching.”

“So that is why you were given a skill that steals other skills.”

“I thought being an adventurer was my true calling. I figured if I hunted

monsters, I'd get money and fame. Nothing easier."

"If that made you happy, might I recommend you go back to it?" Hanakawa was hoping she wouldn't involve herself with him further.

"But there's a limit to how strong people can get. If I lived such a lazy life, I'd hit that limit in no time. From what I've heard, the way to break through that limit is to train desperately hard, even putting your own life on the line."

"Ah, the limit-breaking skill. Those who possess it can be irritating as a matter of course."

Ryousuke Higashida and Yoshiaki Fukuhara, the other two classmates who had been previously summoned to this world with Hanakawa, had possessed that skill. If you had it, you could exceed the human race's level ninety-nine limit. After receiving the Gift, reaching that maximum level took considerable talent and enormous effort. It was the limit for the majority of humans, and unless you were truly exceptional, there was no getting past it. But there were some who could indeed pass that limit with extreme effort. Exceeding level ninety-nine wasn't technically impossible.

"But I hate working hard for something that might not pay off."

"Oh, so you aren't working that hard."

"And then I was given the power to take people's skills just by cutting them."

"Ahh, now I understand. In that case, have you not already obtained your objective?"

"No. This power has a restriction on it. You should know, if we fail to kill Yogiri Takatou, we might lose it."

Either Malna or Rilna had been killed by Yogiri, and the other had fled, so Hanakawa had figured the entire incident was over, but now that Kris mentioned it, he recalled the conditions on their powers. Whoever killed Yogiri would keep their powers as an apostle, but everyone else would lose them.

"Yeah, I don't want to lose this power."

"Uhh, I don't really care either way about that power, so I don't mind if you do whatever you like." Since Hanakawa's power had already been stolen, he couldn't care less.

"And if no one challenges Yogiri for a set time, the apostles will all die. There aren't many of us left, so I figure I should probably take him on soon. I

wanted to get as powerful as I could before trying, though."

"I see. Don't you think the power you possess now should be sufficient?" Hanakawa remarked offhandedly. If she went and challenged Yogiri in her pride and got killed in turn, that would be great for him.

Wait, wouldn't I also die in that case? Hanakawa had no way of beating Yogiri. If the time came and all the apostles died automatically, he wouldn't have a chance of surviving. He hoped that wasn't the case, but one of the twin goddesses *had* escaped. Even if she had lost the will to kill Yogiri, that didn't necessarily mean that the death condition had been lifted.

"Right. I figure I have enough powers to challenge him, but it might take some time to get used to them all. In the process of getting used to them, I thought I might want to eat you. So please come with me."

"Very well." *I suspect if you do get a grasp of those powers, your appetite for me will increase manyfold...*

Staying with Kris was a terrible idea. He wanted to find some way to escape, but there was no point in trying to break away and run now. She had the ability to teleport to wherever he was.

For now, all I can do is expend every effort to survive. His situation seemed hopeless, but things still had a chance to improve. He had been miraculously saved a number of times already, so there was always a chance it might happen again. He had no choice but to entrust all of his hopes to that uncertain future.

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Yoshifumi, Sage and emperor. His lanky form didn't seem to hold much strength, and his behavior didn't give the impression of someone remotely experienced in combat. He looked like nothing more than your average hoodlum, so someone with a reasonable amount of physical prowess should have been able to take him on. Even Vivian felt like she had a chance against him.

"But a fight like this doesn't seem like much fun," Yoshifumi said, despite being the one who had called off his subordinate.

"You're the one who said our fight was a draw," complained the woman Vivian had been fighting up until then.

"If I'm gonna fight somebody, I want them to think they're the strongest

ever and totally look down on me. Seeing someone like that helpless against me is what makes it fun."

"Well, there's no hope of that happening, right? She already knows you're the emperor *and* a Sage."

That was true. No matter how weak he looked, Vivian had no intention of taking him lightly. He was a Sage. She knew he must be incredibly powerful.

"Let's just end this, then. Okay, we're done," Yoshifumi said, having done nothing at all.

"What? What exactly do you think is over?!" Vivian protested. She was still alive and hadn't been hurt in the least.

"Look at your feet," the Sage replied.

Vivian did as she was told. At first, she didn't see what was wrong. She thought for a moment that he had been teasing her, but then she realized the tips of her toes were starting to turn gray. It was like they were turning to stone. And slowly, that gray was spreading.

"If I kill you, you'll just come back to life, so I decided to turn you to stone instead. It's a power I got recently. Enjoy."

"You... Chainsaw Shield!"

Vivian hurled a shield at him, but the Sage's companion knocked it aside easily. With the fight over, his subordinate once again took up a position between the two of them. At this rate, it didn't seem like there was anything Vivian could do.

"This is the same thing you did back at the bar, isn't it?" the woman asked. "Wasn't it instantaneous before?"

"Yeah, but that was boring."

"What? Are you planning on sitting around watching the whole time she transforms?!"

"What's wrong with that?"

"There's nothing wrong, but...how is *that* fun? And we came all the way here. Are you actually happy with turning the princess to stone?"

"Hmm. Now that you mention it, it does sound kind of lame. But that's how it is. There's nothin' else for us to do here. The best I've got is tormenting her a bit."

"If you have nothing else to do, let's go home!"

"Oh, right!" Yoshifumi turned back to Vivian. "You came here with the rest of the royal family, didn't you? Where are they?"

“What does that have to do with you?!” Vivian attempted to create a shield to stop the petrification, but her healing shields didn’t have any effect.

“If there are more of you, I’m thinkin’ of taking you as a hostage.”

“Well, there are! My brothers will come soon, as well as Gale, a swordsman of the Heavenly Blade rank! He’ll cut you in two in a flash!” She didn’t know if there was any point in lying, but she said it anyway in hopes it would extend her life at least a little.

“You’re here for the World Sword ’cause you can’t beat me without it, right? What will a couple more of you be able to do?”

“Wh-Why would I tell you that?!”

“Fair enough. I’d like to think you guys have something up your sleeve. Speaking of which, what happened to the World Sword anyway?”

Whether it was actually the World Sword or not was yet to be determined, but Vivian had tossed away the worn out hunk of rusted metal just in case. It should have been somewhere nearby, but she couldn’t see it.

“Not to mention Rei and Shigeto are gone,” the Sage’s companion added.

“Huh?” A perplexed look came over Yoshifumi’s face before he burst out laughing. “Aha ha ha! They betrayed me?!”

“Wait, didn’t you have something to keep Rei in check?”

“No? She asked to join me, and I was lookin’ for a new Fourth Heavenly King, so I thought she’d fit right in.”

“Oh, come on! You trusted some random girl without any insurance?!”

“I don’t trust anyone. I thought it would be interesting if she tried to pull somethin’.”

“You thought it would be *interesting*?” The woman sighed.

“If you want to betray me someday too, feel free.”

“I know how strong you are. There’s no way I’d try that. They don’t know anything about you.”

“But if they grabbed the sword and ran, does that mean it was the real thing?”

“What are they going to do with it?”

“Somethin’ is probably written in that book of his. I bet they ran away because they had a plan.”

Vivian immediately regretted her actions. The sword actually *was* capable of defeating Yoshifumi, but she had thoughtlessly discarded it.

“Rena, can you follow them?”

“No, not unless I see them running away.”

“I guess we gotta chase them the old-fashioned way.”

Yoshifumi had lost interest in Vivian. It wasn’t that he had forgotten about her, but his attention had been captured by the sudden betrayal.

“Hey,” Vivian called out to him. She was now petrified up to her knees.

“You have friends coming, right?” the Sage answered. “Sure hope they save you.”

Evidently not caring about her fate in the slightest, Yoshifumi and Rena turned to leave the room.

“Wait!”

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“What? You plannin’ on doing something pathetic like asking me to help you?”

“I want a deal! If you undo the petrification, I will tell you where those other two went!”

“Oh? That sounds fun.”

It was still rather pathetic. She was begging for her life from the person who had killed her parents and stolen her country. But if she turned into a statue here, everything would be over. She was the last survivor of the royal line. No matter what happened, she couldn’t die now.

“I have the ability to search for things,” she explained. “That is how I got here in the first place. So no matter where they take it, I can find the World Sword!”

“Oh? That *does* sound interesting.” Yoshifumi snapped his fingers. The petrification that had reached up to her thighs stopped, flakes of stone crumbling and falling to the ground. It seemed the petrification process had only started on the surface.

“Yoshifumi, you’re going to trust *her* now?” Rena complained.

“Like I said, I don’t trust anyone. It’s fine if she tries to pull something. As long as it’s entertaining, I’ll be satisfied.”

“Let me warn you in advance, then,” Rena said to Vivian. “Yoshifumi is stronger than I am, so it’s pointless to try anything. You’ll just get killed. If you want to live a long life, don’t do anything stupid.”

Of course, Vivian had no intention of doing anything to Yoshifumi right away. That would wait until she had retaken the World Sword.

But this guy is full of openings!

Yoshifumi overflowed with arrogance. He was confident enough to believe that even if everyone betrayed him in the end, he was still powerful enough to handle things on his own, so he didn’t pay any attention to the small things. He probably couldn’t stand being that fussy. If she agreed to work with him, she’d have a number of chances. At least, that’s what Vivian convinced herself.

Chapter 13 — You Guys Are Japanese Too, Right? Are There a Lot of Japanese People in This World?

Thanks to the Book of Prophecy, Shigeto had been fully aware that the World Sword Omega Blade would be unusable in its current state. That was why they had been gathering materials to repair it along the way. If he and his companions had obtained the sword as planned, there would have been no issue. But Rei was now one of Yoshifumi's subordinates, and Yoshifumi had taken an interest in the sword. He'd had to change his plans after that.

The Book of Prophecy showed a new route for him to take. The elven village getting wiped out and the royal family reaching the sword first were unexpected, but for the most part, they were advantageous developments. The most dangerous possibility was Yoshifumi deciding the beat-up World Sword was still valuable and taking charge of it himself. If that happened, there would be nothing Shigeto could do. He would have to give up on using the World Sword to defeat the Sage altogether.

But Yoshifumi had lost interest in the weapon immediately, turning his attention to the princess. He was always full of openings. Shigeto had been waiting for a chance to outwit him, and Rena's fight provided the opening he needed.

Shigeto and Rei put on cloaks to turn themselves invisible. They had acquired them on their journey. Although they weren't usable in combat, they were useful for covert action. Collecting the abandoned sword, they left the room. No rush, no noise, fully composed. Keeping themselves hidden, they distanced themselves from Yoshifumi.

"So, how are we going to make the sword usable?" Rei asked once they had gotten far enough away.

Get the World Sword before Yoshifumi can. Those were Rei's instructions. Her abilities as a Femme Fatale had awakened. No longer

merely able to cause men to take an interest in her, she was now capable of enslaving them.

But Shigeto didn't feel like he had been enslaved. He'd had feelings for Rei since long before they'd come to this world. So even without her abilities, he was sure he would have done the same thing to save her. The fact that those past feelings were a false memory created by Rei's powers was impossible for Shigeto to recognize. Those under her control would never realize that they were.

"We need to get farther away. It will take some time to restore the blade." Shigeto had no knowledge or skills related to blacksmithing. But he already had the tools and materials needed to restore the World Sword. The repairs would occur automatically if he used those.

"Let's get out of here," Rei said.

"Yeah. But if we return to the empire, Abby will notice us. We'll need to hide in the forest."

Abby, one of the Four Heavenly Kings, was the head of the adventurers. She kept tabs on everyone who was playing adventurer throughout the kingdom and had the entire empire under observation. The Elven Forest was the only exception. She couldn't see anything inside it.

"Yoshifumi is invincible, but that's all. I'm concerned about Rena's powers, but after this long, she probably would have chased us down if she was able to. We should be outside her range now."

Rena's class was Mid-Boss. That gave her a number of ridiculous abilities, among them the ability to appear in front of someone if they tried to flee or to appear behind someone the moment they stopped, thinking they were safe. But as appropriate for a Mid-Boss, the range of her powers was limited. From what he had heard, it seemed her range was about a hundred meters.

"We've made it far enough away that we don't need to be sneaky anymore. Let's hurry," Navi, the manifestation of Shigeto's Book of Prophecy, said as she appeared in front of them.

"How do we get out of here?"

"The path we took to get here would be too risky, so we'll find another exit. We don't have the time to carefully follow a guidebook to avoid all the traps, so do just as I say."

"Okay."

The three ran off. The ruins were filled with all kinds of traps, but following Navi's instructions they got through without any problems. The layout of the labyrinth and the fixed nature of the traps made them easily circumvented by Shigeto's prophetic powers. From deep underground, they proceeded back to the surface. Eventually, they came across a long hallway lined with large pillars. They could see the light of the exit coming from the far end.

"That's the exit, right?!"

"Yes."

But it was rather far up in the air. The exit was a hole in the ceiling. Continuing to run, they came to a stop directly underneath it. There didn't seem to be anything to allow them to get out.

"How do we get up there?" Shigeto fully trusted that Navi would know how to proceed.

"There's supposed to be an elevator here," she replied.

"All I can see is a pile of rubble." He looked around. Debris that seemed to have fallen from the exit was scattered around them. "While we're stronger than we used to be, I don't think we can jump that high."

It was hard to judge their distance from the exit by eye, but the hallway could probably hold something at least as large as a five-story building. While obtaining the Gift had improved Shigeto's physical characteristics considerably, a jump like that was still far beyond him. He went over the tools available to them in his head, but he couldn't think of anything that would help.

"Is there another exit?"

"Not that I am aware of. The only proper entrances to the ruins are this one and the hidden path we used to get here."

"What should we do?"

"There is always the option of restoring the World Sword right here."

"Will that work?"

"You should know after coming this far, but the labyrinth is quite complex. If you hide within it, it should take them quite a while to find you."

"Can we beat Yoshifumi if we fix the sword?"

"Yes. The World Sword is no ordinary weapon. It will work no matter how powerful your enemy is."

"Hey, it looks like something's coming down." Rei muttered.

“What is it?” Shigeto turned from his conversation with Navi to look at where Rei had indicated. Something looking like a person was descending from the ceiling, like a boy in a white coat.

“Navi, who is that? What does the prophecy say?!”

“I don’t know. The Prophecy was updated the moment we obtained the World Sword, but this person isn’t in it...”

The Book of Prophecy didn’t update in real time. It would update if something significant enough to change the course of the future happened. But if he wasn’t in the Prophecy, the boy must have been an irregular event.

The newcomer slowly descended. It looked like he was descending at whatever speed he wanted to, ignoring gravity. As he approached, Shigeto’s legs began to tremble. He started to sweat, and his heart rate increased. He could tell instinctively that this boy was on an entirely different level, a being that existed in an entirely different dimension, metaphorically.

Shigeto dropped to his knees as his legs gave way and bowed down. It was an instinct born from sheer awe. His body moved on its own as if it knew it had no choice. Rei must have felt the same way, since she was bowing down just as he was. Navi had vanished. She must not have been able to stand being in her human form.

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t think there was anyone down here. I’ll rein in my power a bit.”

At some point, the boy had reached the floor, and his voice came from right beside them. As he spoke, the overwhelming emotion holding their bodies in place lessened. The feeling of awe remained, but they were able to lift their heads.

“Wh-Who might you—”

“I don’t like that. Could you be more casual?”

Shigeto hesitated. He didn’t know if it was really wise to speak so bluntly to someone who was clearly that superior.

Do as he says. Someone on his level has no need for complicated formalities.

At Navi’s words, Shigeto felt himself relax a little.

“Hello.”

“Yeah, hi.”

The boy returned the greeting with a smile. He wasn’t acting hostile. If he had bad intentions, talking with him in this way would have been impossible.

“Could you stand up? I want to talk a bit, but seeing you kneeling like that is kind of off-putting.”

Rei and Shigeto rose to their feet.

“Are you...Japanese?” Shigeto asked. Judging from the boy’s face, he was Japanese and about the same age as them.

“Japan, huh? That’s a nostalgic word. Yeah, I’m from Japan.”

“Were you summoned here by the Sages too?” Being formal and self-deprecating might end up offending him, so Shigeto figured it was best to speak casually.

“I was invited here, but I don’t think it was by a Sage. Wait, maybe it was? Are Sages people who look like little girls with wings?”

“No idea. I’m sure there are Sages of all kinds, but...” Shigeto had only ever met two of them: Sion and Yoshifumi. There didn’t seem to be anything in common between the pair, so he had no clue what the other Sages were like.

“Huh. You guys are Japanese too, right? Are there a lot of Japanese people in this world?”

“Not that we came here on purpose. But yes, there are quite a few Japanese people here.”

“Oh really? I’m Takumi. What’re your names?”

“My name is Shigeto Mitadera. This is Rei Kushima.”

“Oh, right! We generally have last names too! I totally forgot mine, though.”

“Why are you here, Takumi?”

“I’m looking for something.”

Shigeto’s heart began to race again. If the boy was looking for something here, it was unlikely to be anything other than the World Sword. And if he wanted the World Sword, they’d have no way of keeping it from him. If he told them to hand it over, Shigeto felt like he would do so quite willingly.

“Can I ask what you’re looking for?” he managed to squeeze out.

“Sure, but why are you so nervous about it?” Takumi asked, a bit puzzled.

“I’m just kind of shy. I’m not so good at talking to strangers.”

“Oh, really? Well, I’m looking for a god.”

Shigeto relaxed a little. “Are they here?”

“Hmm. It’s hard to say. She lost her power and was split into pieces, but it feels like part of her is nearby.”

“So you’re trying to collect the pieces and put her back together?”

“That’s right. I want to kill her, but I have to put her back together first.”

“Are you...not a god yourself?” With the divine aura he exuded, Shigeto would believe the boy instantly if he’d said he was.

“Like I told you, I’m Japanese, so I’m not a god or anything. But a lot of things happened, and now I can kill gods. I guess if you think having the ability to kill a god makes you a god, I meet that requirement.”

“Why do you want to kill gods?”

“It’s just a hobby. There isn’t really anything else that I find challenging.”

That seemed to be the sentiment expressed by everyone who obtained great power. Yoshifumi was the same way, having so much power that he ended up doing nothing but looking for ways to kill time.

“All right, well, I should probably get going,” Takumi said. “Sorry for stopping you guys.”

“We were already stuck here before you arrived, so don’t worry about it.”

“Oh, really? Are you trying to get out of here?”

“Yes. We were just trying to think of a way to get outside.”

“You should have said something earlier. All right, I’ll get you guys out. You just want to go up there, right?” he said, pointing at the ceiling.

As Shigeto nodded, he and Rei began to float upward.

“What?!”

“See ya.”

They continued to float upward, reaching the exit in no time, passing through the opening in the ceiling and making it above ground before dropping safely onto solid earth.

Shigeto’s body was absolutely gushing sweat. He could feel Takumi getting farther away. That overwhelming presence was getting slightly weaker, heading deeper underground.

“What the hell was that?” he muttered.

“That was terrifying.” Rei made no attempt to hide her feelings.

“Anyway! Let’s get out of here!” Navi said as she reappeared.

They didn’t know what was going on, but they had been saved. If they sat around doing nothing, Yoshifumi would catch up to them, making it all pointless. They needed to find a place to hide right away.

Shigeto looked around, searching for a destination. The terrain around them was in terrible shape. Something had melted a straight line through the

earth. The beam of light that had destroyed the elven village had also reached this place. They were in a collection of ruins, but the attack had erased everything in its path.

“Those buildings are guardians made to protect this place. They will transform and attack you, so don’t get any closer to them,” Navi shared from the Book of Prophecy.

“Then into the forest, I suppose.”

“Yes. I don’t know if I should call us lucky, but following the trail of that beam of light should take us back into the forest very easily.”

Having collected themselves, the three ran off towards the forest.

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Chapter 14 — Wait, Aliens Are Real?!

They had no idea how to get out of the forest right away. Worrying about it would get them nowhere, so Yogiri decided to sleep. He had used his power quite a bit, so he was rather tired.

Tomochika used the free time to change. Their time traveling through the forest had gotten her clothes quite dirty.

“Hanakawa might have been able to do something if he was with us. He had some power to summon anyone he wanted, so he might have been able to summon someone who could get us out of here.”

“I find it hard to believe he was truly capable of summoning *anyone*,” Mokomoko replied, “though perhaps it would be worth trying anyway.”

“Well, we don’t even know where he is now.”

“The only place that really stands out in this forest is these ruins. If he is lost, I am sure he will turn up here eventually, don’t you think?”

“Maybe it’s rude to say, but I feel like Hanakawa isn’t very lucky.”

“There is no point in wondering when he isn’t here in the first place. To change topics, as far as making it through the Lost Woods, perhaps there is a method that is a little more certain than killing the entire forest.”

“What’s that?”

“The portion of the forest that was turned into the Lost Woods is entirely outside the hexagon formed by those six enormous trees. It is likely that they serve as the source of the spell creating the warped space. It may be worthwhile to try killing them first.”

“That might work,” Tomochika agreed. “‘The forest’ is so general, but those six trees are easy to distinguish.”

Yogiri’s ability was to kill a specific target, so he wasn’t good at killing only part of a forest. But if the target were those specific trees, there should be no problem.

“Aside from that,” Mokomoko continued, “we could also consider investigating these ruins a little more. It seems the Elven Forest exists to protect them. The actions of the elves also seem to support that. This

indicates it is a place of great importance. There may be something here that allows for control of the forest itself."

"I don't know how I feel about any of this. Are you sure it's okay for us to mess up the magic that's protected this spot for so long when we just want to leave?"

"We have no choice. Anyhow, the elves who would complain about it are already dead."

There was a possibility of some survivors, but they had decided that trying to search for them would be too difficult.

"First, we should investigate the ruins. If there are no clues, then I feel bad for the elves, but we will have to kill the giant trees. We have spent far too long here already. Our journey may not be a rushed one, but we cannot take things that slowly."

"Yeah, I'm kind of sick of the jungle," Tomochika agreed.

The Elven Forest was far from a hospitable environment. She had no desire to stay any longer than they had to.

"So, what do we do about her?" She looked at the baby wrapped in cloth nearby. It had continued to grow and now had a light head of hair. "Will it keep growing if we leave it like this?"

"It appears its growth is slowing down," Mokomoko replied.

The baby had an adorable sleeping face. They couldn't see it as anything other than human at this point, so Tomochika couldn't bear the thought of abandoning it. As she watched, it began to stir, opening its eyes for the first time.

"Huh? It's awake?"

"Waaaaaaaaaaaah!" It began to wail with an earsplitting cry.

"Huh? What? Uhh? What do I do?!"

"What's wrong?" Of course, the noise woke Yogiri.

"It's crying! What do we do?!" Tomochika was in a total panic.

"I don't know. I guess pick it up?"

Tomochika was still hesitant to touch the mysterious baby. Yogiri didn't seem to have any such inhibitions, though, so he immediately stepped over and lifted it up. And then began to rock it.

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“Huh? Are you sure it’s okay to do that?!”

“Who knows?”

Tomochika was unsure about holding a baby who couldn’t even support the weight of its own head yet, but Yogiri didn’t seem to care. After he shook it, the baby quieted down. They didn’t know what had been wrong, but it seemed to be calm again for the moment.

“Now what?” Yogiri asked.

“It feels bad just calling it ‘it’ all the time.”

“You want to give it a name?”

“I don’t know about that, but I feel like we do need something to call it.”

“Hmm. How about ‘the baby’?” he suggested.

“Okay, you’re not even trying!”

“I don’t think this is really the right time to be giving out a name with a lot of thought and emotion behind it.”

Of course, they didn’t know what would happen in the future. Getting too attached to the baby didn’t seem like a great idea.

“By the way, did you change earlier?”

“Yeah. We’re out of the forest, so I wanted something fresh. Are you going to stay like that, Takatou?”

“Good point. I should have changed before going to sleep.” Yogiri fished through their belongings, pulling out a change of clothes.

“They look exactly the same.”

“It’s fine, as long as they cover me.” Yogiri headed to a deeper room, changed, and came back.

“Young man, we have spoken a little of what to do next.”

Mokomoko shared what she and Tomochika had discussed while he was asleep. Yogiri didn’t have any objections, so they decided to start by searching the ruins.

“What do we do with the baby?”

“I guess we have to bring her with us. But holding her the whole time sounds rough.”

“Shall we create a baby carrier?” the spirit suggested.

“Do you know how to make one?”

“It can’t be that difficult.”

Mokomoko grabbed a piece of cloth, folding it over to connect the edges to each other and create a ring, and laid it diagonally over Yogiri’s shoulder.

Then she fiddled with it to create something like a pocket around his chest. In effect, she had created a simple sling.

"So I guess I'm stuck carrying her after all," Yogiri said as they put the baby into the sling. In spite of Mokomoko improvising it on the spot, it seemed fairly sturdy.

"What are we supposed to do with such a small baby, though?" Tomochika asked.

"What happens if it wants milk?"

"Don't look at me! It's not like I'll be able to give it anything!"

Seeming to find Tomochika's desperate refusal amusing, the baby started to laugh. Since Yogiri was holding on to the infant, Tomochika carried the backpack.

Stepping out of the building, she immediately felt like something was wrong. It was too dark outside, even though it was supposed to be the middle of the day. She looked up.

A huge crowd of enormous objects were floating in the sky.

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Killing a single human didn't require an entire fleet. No matter how powerful the target was, sending a few of their leaders after him would be more than enough. The "pirates" hadn't brought almost their entire fleet into the Foundation to kill Yogiri. The reward of ten quadrillion credits was appealing, so they intended to fulfill their end of the contract, but even more enticing was the chance to enter a Celestial Foundation with no resistance.

These pirates possessed enough firepower to crush a Celestial Foundation from the outside. However, all that would gain them were mineral resources and energy. The art and cultural assets created by the civilization within the Foundation couldn't be obtained by attacking from the sea, so the fleet had come inside to plunder everything of value from this world. Their ships were enormous freighters, giant storehouses.

The pirates started by searching for Yogiri Takatou's location. Finding a single human within a Celestial Foundation was child's play for their science and technology. The reward for the job was first come, first served, so they decided that finishing the job as soon as possible would be best.

Of course, the idea of someone offering ten quadrillion credits for the

assassination of a single human boy was absurd. It would be best to assume he posed enough of a threat to warrant that reward. But the pirates' confidence in their abilities would not be swayed. They had turned entire Celestial Foundations into their enemies and destroyed them utterly. At this point, even the gods ran in fear from them.

They weren't the least bit concerned about some instant death power.

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"Uhh...what are those?" Tomochika asked.

Enormous streamlined objects were floating in the air. They filled the sky, blocking out the sunlight. There were enough of them that they could only be called countless, filling the space overhead as far as the eye could see. Counting them seemed impossible.

"Spaceships?" Yogiri guessed, searching his memory for anything similar. The best he could think of were the unrealistic ships he'd seen in manga and anime. "I've never seen a real one before..."

"They look kind of alive."

The vessels were covered in a sort of metallic armor. But beneath the gaps in that armor appeared to be living tissue. They also expanded and compressed over time, like they were breathing. Whether they were animals of some kind or not, they seemed soft and flexible underneath.

"What are they? Did they stick metal plates all over a fish or something?" That's how it looked to Yogiri.

"Actually, we did get attacked by a whole bunch of robots earlier. Are these types of things that widespread?"

"They're not going anywhere, just sitting still. I wonder what they want?"

"If they're spaceships, does that mean there are aliens inside?"

"I've been attacked by people calling themselves aliens before, but that was back in our world."

"Oh, so aliens are real. Nothing really surprises me at this point—okay, this does, though!" Tomochika shouted. "Really? Aliens are real?!"

"With things like youkai and ESP around, the existence of aliens isn't that strange, is it?" Mokomoko said.

"I was more surprised about other worlds and their people existing than I was about aliens," Yogiri remarked.

"Are they after us?" asked Tomochika.

Mokomoko thought for a moment. "I have no idea. They're spread over

such a wide area, I find it hard to believe—”

As they watched, something dropped from one of the floating objects.

“Huh? Don’t those look like people?” Tomochika’s eyesight was good enough to tell what was coming down. Whatever they were, they struck the ground and splattered. “Are they killing themselves?!” She was taken aback by their unexpected behavior.

“No, I killed them,” said Yogiri. “Or rather, they died on their own.”

They were far too dangerous. Their existence alone was enough to kill everything around them. At least, that’s the aura they exuded. So just before the invaders got close enough for that power to affect the three of them, Yogiri’s power activated automatically. Even to him, it seemed like they had died of their own accord.

“What were they?” Tomochika asked.

“Whatever they were, they’re splattered now.” Their original forms hadn’t survived the impact. “If they’re coming down here, does that mean they’re looking for us?”

“Oh! Something else is coming!”

This time, three of them descended, dropping down in a new location about fifty meters away. Killing intent filled the air. Whatever abilities they possessed, they could kill Yogiri and Tomochika at any point if they were close by.

Their appearance was bizarre. One was a naked man whose muscles were so bulky they seemed impossible. One was a human figure made of red string. One was a mechanical doll, moving around on wheels with countless arms. They began to approach.

“You are—”

“Die,” Yogiri cut the creature off. It and its two companions stopped moving immediately.

“They were trying to say something, weren’t they?” Tomochika asked.

“Yeah, but they’re way too dangerous. I can’t afford to hear them out.”

As they’d gotten closer, he’d felt the deadly presence from them getting stronger. He’d had to kill them before they could get close enough to use it.

“Are they really aliens?” Tomochika asked.

“It seems they’re after us, but I don’t remember offending anyone like this.”

“Well, I don’t know about that. They could be related to someone you’ve

already killed."

Yogiri didn't have an answer to that. He couldn't even count the people he had killed, so he couldn't say with confidence that they were totally unrelated.

"Either way, that's no reason to let them kill us."

The floating objects in the sky all turned. If they were ships, it looked like they had turned to face him. And then they opened their mouths. The openings were lined top and bottom with teeth. The air began to shake as the vessels roared. Deep within their mouths, a light began to glow, growing brighter and gathering intensity until it seemed they were about to fire.

"Die."

"Yeah, I thought so." Tomochika had easily guessed what was about to happen.

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They were filled with confusion. The killers they had sent had been unable to do anything. That was unbelievable. Resistance to instant death was a given in battles that occurred in the celestial sea.

Instant death. Reflection. Time stop. Time reversal. Spatial severance. Total erasure. Conceptual attacks. Causality erasure. Such things were possible for virtually anyone in the sea, so the leaders of the pirates were more than capable of neutralizing them.

But those elites, veterans of hundreds of battles, had been killed without offering the slightest resistance. Considering this the worst case scenario, they analyzed the situation. But no one could understand what had happened. There was no indication they had received any damage. They had just dropped dead. They had ceased to function. There didn't seem to be any cause to the effect or an activation of any power.

The phenomenon was just too irrational, so they stopped thinking about it. They couldn't get stuck simply because they didn't understand what had happened. They decided to use the ships' cannons. They would gather energy and focus it on the island beneath them. If a single one of the more than a hundred million cannons hit their mark, the entire island would be annihilated. It wasn't the kind of weapon they wanted to unleash within a Celestial Foundation, but the loss of a single island was tolerable collateral

damage. There would be plenty of plunder to be gained from the other landmasses.

They ordered all cannons to fire.

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The light gathering in the mouths of the countless ships winked out. And then they fell.

Whatever power they had used to stay floating in the air, it was only natural that they'd fall if they died.

"Wait, are we safe here?! Won't they land on us?!"

"I think we're probably fine," Yogiri answered.

Luckily, it didn't seem like any of the ships would land on them. Though they filled the sky, there was plenty of distance between each ship. The enormous objects struck the ground all at once, shaking the earth violently, crushing everything underneath them. The ruins, the rainforest, and the six enormous trees were all crushed and completely destroyed.

"Looks like we won't have to go out of our way to kill the trees after all," Yogiri observed.

"Forget the forest; it looks like the whole island is in danger," said Tomochika.

"Hm. The greater the foe, the greater the damage done by felling them..." Mokomoko murmured.

But the ships had been targeting them, so their only option was to kill them first. If the environment around them sustained significant damage as a result, that wasn't Yogiri's problem. He had no intention of sitting down and dying. He wouldn't hesitate to do whatever it took to get them back to their world.

"Did you get all of them?"

"I don't know. I only killed the spaceship-looking things, so the people inside could still be alive."

By killing the ships, he had stopped the attack. There was no need to do anything more at this point.

Chapter 15 — I Love Getting Good Results Easily!

The ships were sturdy enough that they didn't seem to take any damage from falling. Dying should have meant that they stopped moving entirely, but one ship exploded as it struck the ground. Some kind of internal pressure must have caused it to rupture. Darkness gushed out of it as chunks of the ship scattered across the landscape.

Yogiri moved their group a little bit to avoid the falling pieces of debris.

"What is that?" Tomochika had gone pale and was trembling. She must have been feeling the effects of the overwhelming miasma.

All at once, the darkness spilling out of the destroyed ship collected in one place into the shape of a tiny person right in front of them. It was like a concentration of pure evil, a being whose existence itself seemed profane. A crystallization of pure hatred. It was the most malicious creature Yogiri had yet to encounter in this world.

"____"

"Die."

It had tried to say something, but Yogiri wouldn't allow a single word from that creature to reach their ears. It could steal a person's sanity and crush their mind with ease, so he decided to get rid of it immediately. The darkness dissipated, dissolving into the air. Its influence on the area around them immediately stopped.

"Uhh...what was that?"

"No idea. It looked dangerous, though, so I killed it before something could happen. I hope there aren't many more like it."

The ships were falling to the ground, but it seemed the passengers had all survived. Even if there had been only a single person on each ship, there were a tremendous number of them. If there were more beings like that concentrated evil lying in wait, it wasn't something they could ignore, so Yogiri simply killed everyone within the ships.

“Uhh, did you get them all?”

“Some of them might have made it out of the ships already. There’s no way for me to catch them.”

There were likely some beings inside the ships who hadn’t specifically aimed killing intent at them, but they were still aboard a vessel that had tried to fire its cannons. He figured that made them complicit.

“So, should we try leaving the forest now?” The baby at Yogiri’s chest began to whine at his suggestion.

“Is she hungry?”

“If she is, we have nothing suitable for an infant,” Mokomoko pointed out.

“I heard goat’s milk can be used as a substitute. Not that we have any of that either.” Yogiri did remember that giving cow’s milk to a newborn was a bad idea, but they didn’t know if this creature was remotely similar to a human newborn.

The baby stretched out a hand, desperately reaching for something that wasn’t there.

“Is it trying to tell us something?” Yogiri tried turning, but the baby kept stretching out in the same direction. “Looks like it’s pointing in that direction. Does it want to go that way?”

“I don’t know about this. There are a lot of urban legends and stories of things like youkai trying to lead you to your doom, aren’t there?”

“You think she’s a youkai?”

“Something like that. Aren’t there a lot of youkai that look like babies?” Tomochika spoke softly, clearly uneasy about the whole situation.

“But aren’t you curious?”

“I guess. We can’t really ignore her.”

They started walking in the direction the baby was pointing.

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Hanakawa watched blankly as Kris danced about, slaying the bizarre creatures with ease. For now, her appetite hadn’t gotten the better of her, so he was safe. But he had no idea how things would go in the future. Most likely, her mind was being slowly corrupted by Carla, so he was going to have to do something before the two personalities integrated fully. Right

now, however, there was nothing he *could* do. His best bet was to wait for a chance to show itself.

"You seem rather powerful already. Is there really any need for you to gain more strength?"

"Well, probably not, but I love getting such good results so easily!"

Kris was making use of the Summon Anything ability. She summoned anything that seemed willing, then killed them immediately. In this way, she continuously gained more skills, and even if her opponents had none of their own, she could raise her stats like strength and stamina. Regardless of who her opponent was, if she killed them, she got stronger. As a result, the forest around them was filled with mounds of corpses, countless bodies carpeting the ground.

"I got something good that time!"

"Oh? What was it?"

"A skill called Skill Search. Now I can find people who have special skills."

"Ha ha ha...running away is starting to look more and more impossible..."

"Combined with my original power, I can prioritize taking skills when I hit people. Let's see if there's anyone with rare skills nearby!"

Even if she didn't know the skill's name, she could use the search function to tell how many skills her opponent had and how rare they were and could limit her stealing ability to target skills of a certain kind. She wouldn't have to waste her time slicing people up over and over until she got the skill she was looking for.

"How is that fair? You already get stronger by randomly killing people, and now you have found an efficiency boost as well?!"

Kris focused on her new skill. After a short wait, she began walking.

"Does this mean you found someone with a rare skill?" Hanakawa asked. It was hard to believe there was someone useful out here in the middle of the forest.

"Yes. Two hundred meters in this direction."

Hanakawa followed her. If he tried to linger behind, she would only force him to move, so he preferred walking on his own.

After a time, they came across a cave. Someone with a rare skill must have been hiding inside.

"Would it not be easier to attack them from out here?"

“Maybe, but if I don’t hit them with the sword, I can’t take their powers.”

They entered the cave. It was dark and hard to see inside, but there were two figures. Kris wasted no time, promptly closing the distance between them. She hadn’t even stopped to consider whether they were strong opponents.

Her victims were incapable of reacting. The first was beheaded without any resistance. The second managed to lift his arms to protect himself, but Kris’s sword sliced right through, neatly bisecting his torso.

The man screamed. Somehow, he was still alive as he jumped backwards. As Hanakawa’s eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness of the cave, he realized that he recognized the person in front of him.

“Well, if it isn’t Sir Mitadera!”

Shigeto Mitadera. One of the classmates who had been transported to this world with him.

“Hanakawa! What the hell are you doing?!”

“*I* am doing nothing at all! I would like to make that perfectly clear!”

Shigeto dropped to the ground, clutching his wounded stomach. Blood poured out from between his fingers. The injury had clearly reached his internal organs.

“Femme Fatale and Master Oracle? Not very useful in combat, are they?”

The other figure, now headless, was another one of his classmates, Rei Kushima.

For having the power to take control of others, she died awfully easily...

Rei’s class was Femme Fatale. It allowed her to seduce members of the opposite sex. She had two ways of fighting. The first was to enrapture and dominate her opponent. However, Kris was a heterosexual woman, so Rei’s abilities had no effect on her. The other option was to enslave a powerful man to fight for her, but of course that wasn’t helpful in this situation. The only male around was Shigeto, and he wasn’t particularly strong. In the end, a woman who was powerful on her own was an opponent Rei couldn’t win against.

“Wait, were you two not with Yoshifumi?!” Hanakawa looked around in a panic for the Sage, but it didn’t seem like anyone else was there.

“Are these two friends of yours?”

“They are...acquaintances, I suppose.”

They had traveled together for a short time, but the pair had spent that

time mercilessly tormenting him. Even now the memories made him angry, and his grudge hadn't faded. It didn't bother him in the least to see them die. He could hardly call them friends.

"Dammit! Navi, you never warned me about this! What am I supposed to do now?!"

In response to Shigeto's shout, a small girl appeared. But she appeared at Kris's side.

"I never thought it would turn out this way," she said with a sigh. "Game over because a serial killer appeared out of nowhere. What a terrible way to end things."

"What do you mean, 'game over'?!"

"Sorry. Your powers of prophecy have been transferred to this person. She is my master now. Your journey ends here."

"What?" Shigeto was stunned. His only ability was that of prophecy. If he lost it, he had nothing left.

"Master, I propose you use your Femme Fatale abilities to enslave him."

"Sounds fine." Kris must have activated her power, as the hatred burning in Shigeto's eyes immediately vanished.

"Hanakawa, could you please heal him?" Navi continued.

"Uh, very well." Hanakawa had no obligation to do as she said, but he complied nonetheless. Shigeto's arms reconnected and the wound in his abdomen closed.

"There is something deeper within this cave, isn't there?" Kris asked, walking farther in.

The other three followed her. The cave quickly came to a dead end, where they saw a sphere of water, just large enough to be held in one's arms, floating in the air. A number of objects floated within it, moving around inside as if carried by some internal current.

"What is that?" asked Hanakawa.

"The cocoon of the World Sword Omega Blade. The World Sword is being reconstructed inside it," Navi explained.

Now that she mentioned it, Hanakawa could see something like the grip of a sword floating within.

"So that is the World Sword. It is supposed to be extremely powerful, is it not?"

"Correct. It possesses an invincible power."

“Well, it is called the World Sword, after all,” Hanakawa remarked. “It appears to me that this reconstruction will take quite some time, though.”

“That’s right. It will be a while before it’s finished.”

“And I assume we cannot bring it with us?”

“Correct. Once the reconstruction begins, you can’t move it. If you do, you’ll have to start from the beginning.”

“Hm. What do you think we should do with this, Miss Kris?” Hanakawa asked his captor.

“I don’t like relying on weapons for my strength, so I don’t care.” She didn’t seem all that interested in the weapon. The sword she had right now wasn’t famous enough to have a name, but it was working well enough for her.

“Would it not be a nuisance to have it fall into someone else’s hands?” Navi asked. “How about leaving Shigeto here to watch over it until the reconstruction is complete?”

She had predicted Kris’s lack of enthusiasm and had suggested dominating and healing Shigeto for that reason.

“I’ll leave it to you then. I’m going to go look for some more rare skills.”

Now that she had the pair’s skills, Kris had no further business there. She and Navi made their way to the mouth of the cave.

Hanakawa followed them. He thought it might be all right for him to stay behind, but she had told him to follow. He was too scared to disobey.

At some point, Navi disappeared. She didn’t seem to have much advice to offer at the moment.

“What do you intend to do now?” Hanakawa asked Kris.

“Good question. There seems to be someone with a rare skill not too far away, so I think I’ll head there.”

“I believe you are already sufficiently powerful...”

Walking through the rainforest, they came upon a clearing filled with rows of stone structures. A huge scar cut through the center of the clearing, like something enormous had passed through. The melted earth stretched in either direction in a perfectly straight line.

“That damage looks pretty recent, doesn’t it?” Hanakawa observed.

“Who knows?”

Something was clearly wrong, but Kris didn’t seem to care. She stepped into the scar in the earth, walking along it into the clearing. Eventually, they

came across a hole in the ground.

"It's down here."

"Ha ha, it is too dark to make out much in there, isn't it?"

It appeared to be an entrance to an underground area. There wasn't any light inside, so they had no idea what kind of place it was.

"It's fine. I have a night vision skill."

"That does not help me in the slightest. Are we going in?"

"Yes."

Hanakawa's heart jumped in his chest as Kris grabbed him by the back of the neck and lifted him into the air. She was unimaginably strong.

"Wait, are you planning on just falli— Gaaaaaaah!"

Hanakawa in hand, she leaped into the darkness.

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Chapter 16 — I'm More Obsessed with You Than I Realized. I Love You, So Please Come Back.

Kris hit the floor. The shock of the impact traveled straight through her to Hanakawa, delivering enough force that he thought his neck might snap, before she unceremoniously threw him to the ground.

"Heal! Heal!"

Sprawled on the ground, Hanakawa desperately healed himself. His magical energy was depleted as his injuries vanished. Once the pain subsided, he stood up.

"Could I perhaps bother you to treat me with a little more respect?! You may see me as nothing more than food, but that in itself is rather hurtful!"

"Hmm. I couldn't really care less. In the end, food is chewed up anyway, so what does its appearance matter?"

"Visuals play an important role in defining taste! Do you not want me to be at my best flavor?!" For some reason, Hanakawa was appealing to improve his own flavor.

"I guess so. I'll try to be careful, then."

Everything around them was dark. The amount of light streaming in from the opening above wasn't much, so Hanakawa could barely see anything. It was no problem for Kris, though, as she just walked on.

"I cannot imagine I will be able to follow you like this."

Completely blind, he would have to follow her by sound alone, but having never done something like that before, he wasn't confident that he could actually manage it.

"I guess I have no choice," Kris sighed, coming to a stop.

Soon after, a light appeared over Hanakawa's head. Looking up, he saw a glowing sphere hovering a few meters above him. Whatever magic had been used to create seemed to have linked it to his movements, causing it to follow

him as he walked.

"I got a skill that lets me do that."

"You can do more or less anything now, can't you?"

Hanakawa looked around. They were inside a stone building. Large pillars lined the room, supporting the lofty ceiling. It gave him the impression of an underground labyrinth.

"Now then. Where is the skill bearer?"

"This way." Kris walked off, and Hanakawa hurried up to walk alongside her.

"Out of curiosity, has your appetite for me begun to sublimate into a state of affection yet? Perhaps you've come to feel that eating me is a waste and you would prefer to set me free so that I might find happiness?"

"No. Actually, I'm starting to get even more hungry. My aversion to eating another person is still stronger for the moment, but I've begun to salivate whenever I look at you."

"How repulsive. One of the few times a woman has ever taken interest in me...and it's as *food*?"

The situation was as dangerous as ever. He knew it wasn't safe to simply be swept along and follow her around, but there wasn't much else he could do.

Considering how things have worked out up until now, the chance that something extremely bizarre will happen to totally transform the situation is rather high. The best he could do was hope that his luck would hold.

Continuing deeper into the labyrinth, the ceiling dropped lower and the corridor grew narrower. It began to fork in multiple places, creating exactly the kind of maze that he had imagined.

"So, where is the person with the rare skill?"

It would be bad for his heart to happen upon them out of nowhere. He asked in hopes of having time to prepare himself for the encounter.

"They're close. Horizontally, they're about a hundred meters away, but they also seem to be a floor below us."

"So...the fight is almost upon us?"

"They've just ascended. They're on the same floor as us now. Seventy meters ahead."

"How many of them are there?"

"Three."

“Have you stopped to consider that they may be more powerful than you are? If your opponents have rare skills, is there not a considerable possibility that they are incredibly strong?”

“I’ll cross that bridge when I get to it. There’s always a chance I’ll run into a fight I can’t win, so there’s no point cowering in fear. And in my case, there’s the possibility of a single strike allowing me to steal their skill and turn the tide. My ability to steal skills is perfectly suited to killing extremely powerful foes.”

They continued on in search of the rare skill-holder. If their opponent was moving, they would show up sooner rather than later.

The corridor went straight for a time before turning a corner, so the enemy would likely come from there.

“Here I go.”

Following the principle of “he who strikes first wins,” Kris dashed towards the curve. Three figures appeared from around it, and she was immediately blown away, sent flying straight past Hanakawa.

“Excuse me?!” Hanakawa cried.

There were three people in front of him: a girl who stood as if having just delivered a kick, an arrogant man dressed like a common thug, and a girl with shields floating around her. He didn’t recognize the last one, but the first two were the Sage Yoshifumi and one of his Four Heavenly Kings, Rena.

Hanakawa turned to check on Kris. She was lying motionless on the ground. The huge hole in her stomach would have meant instant death to an ordinary human.

“Hanakawaaaaaaaa!” Yoshifumi yelled. “You bastard! How dare you run away from meeeeeee!”

“I-I’m sorryyyyyyyyy!” He immediately dropped to his hands and knees.

“You’ve got guts to show up in front of me again!” The Sage was furious.

“I’ll explain! Please, allow me to explain! I promise! I definitely did not leave your side of my own free will!”

“Who the hell cares? The point is, you ran away without my permission!”

“Be quiet, Yoshifumi,” Rena interrupted. “At least let him talk. If he was planning on running from you, why would he be wandering around here?”

“Huh? Oh, I guess that’s a good point.”

As the Sage decided to hear him out, Hanakawa immediately took the chance to spill his guts.

“It was Malnarilna! Those damned goddesses made me one of their apostles and tried to force me to do their work! They instructed me to go kill Yogiri Takatou! I had no desire to comply, but they were gods! There was no way for me to resist them! Following their demand that I slay Yogiri Takatou, they summoned me to his side! Even though I had no intention of engaging in combat with him! After that, the lady that Miss Rena kicked away captured me as livestock! She planned on eating me in the future! In truth, you have saved me! Thank you ever so much, Miss Rena! Shall I lick your feet in thanks?”

“Why would you even ask that? That’s disgusting.”

“Oh? Malnarilna, huh?” Yoshifumi said. “I thought they said they’d leave the Sages alone.”

“I know nothing about that arrangement! They appeared to me in a dream!”

“Well, even if you didn’t want to betray me, regardless of the situation, I need to set an example!”

“Umm! Actually, I would like to request that you save me! She still very much intends to eat me!”

“The hell? She’s dead.”

“Killing her isn’t good enough!”

As Hanakawa pointed behind him, Kris was rising to her feet. The hole in her stomach had closed. He never expected such an injury to actually kill her.

“Ugh, does she come back to life after dying too?” Rena groaned.

Yoshifumi snorted. “Well, I guess I can save you.”

“Really?!”

“But rules are rules.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ll be spinnin’ the turbines under the capital. You’ll be worked so hard that you’ll lose all that disgusting fat in no time.”

“Gah, are you serious?! Could you not show a little mercy? I was just thrown about with no regard to my will!”

“Nope. A crime is a crime.”

Hanakawa contemplated the situation for a moment. In the end, he found the prospect of forced labor more appealing than being eaten. And regardless of the Sage’s words, Yoshifumi had taken an interest in Hanakawa. He didn’t expect things would go *that* poorly for him.

“Very well! I will accept any punishment, so please save me!” Still on his hands and knees, he scuttled over to the Sage’s group.

“How do you even move like that?” Yoshifumi asked.

“Gross...”

Hanakawa moved quickly behind Yoshifumi. From the Sage’s shadow, he looked back at Kris, who was staring directly at him.

“Ahh...so this is what they mean by ‘You don’t know what you have until it’s gone.’ I’m more obsessed with you than I realized. I love you, so please come back.”

“You only love me as a food! I refuse! Now! Please do something about her!”

“What exactly is going on between you two? Whatever. Rena, deal with her.”

“What? What am I supposed to do against someone who comes back to life?”

“Vivian, do you have any idea how she’s doing that?” Yoshifumi asked the girl with the shields.

“How should I know?!”

“If you’re not useful, I’ll turn you back to stone. Use your Search Shield or whatever to figure it out.”

Vivian paused for a moment before reluctantly replying. “It’s pretty simple. She has a number of spare lives. Beating her is easy; you just need to kill her until she runs out.”

“There you go. Good luck.”

“Whaaaat?! Can’t you turn *her* to stone?!”

“Listen, I’m the emperor. You get it? EM-PER-OR. Why should I be fighting on the front lines? You should be doing everything you can to protect *me*, even if I don’t order you to.”

“Except *you’re* the one who keeps stepping out on the front lines!”

“I’m just doin’ whatever I want. And right now, I don’t wanna fight.”

“In addition, she possesses an ability to steal skills from anyone she cuts with her sword! If she lands a single blow, you will likely be defeated!” Hanakawa would be in a lot of trouble if Yoshifumi didn’t win. He wanted to increase their chances of winning as much as possible.

Vivian clicked her tongue, disappointed. It seemed she had known about Kris’s power and intentionally said nothing.

“Is that so? Good luck.”
“Fine, fine. I just have to not get hit, right?”
Rena stretched out her right hand.

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A beam of light erased the top half of Kris's body. She regenerated in an instant, but Rena continued firing. If getting cut was a problem, she was happy to fight from a distance.

"How many lives does she have?" Yoshifumi asked Vivian.

"About ten thousand?"

"That's way too many!" Hanakawa exclaimed.

"I dunno, I think she can manage ten thousand." The Sage shrugged.

"She can?!"

Rena's strength was overwhelming. Her attacks fired at the speed of light, making avoiding them impossible. When the light struck, it created an explosion that caught everything in the area around it. Kris didn't seem to have any way to fight back.

Then she suddenly disappeared.

"Oh!"

In that moment, Hanakawa remembered that Kris had the ability to teleport next to him. Appearing in the space between Rena and Hanakawa, she thrust her favorite sword forward.

A strike from a blind spot. Normally, one would have no way to dodge such an attack, but Rena blocked it with a shield.

"Hey! That's *my* shield!"

"Thanks for lending it to me."

Rena had grabbed one of the shields floating in the air around Vivian and used it to defend herself.

"I also forgot to mention, she has the ability to teleport to me!"

"Don't forget things like that," Yoshifumi complained. "Get outta here."

He delivered a swift kick to Hanakawa, who was still on his hands and knees. The kick sent him rolling down the hallway. Rena kicked Kris in the opposite direction. Now at a safe distance from her once again, Rena resumed her fire.

"Huh? If she teleports to me now, will I not be caught in the crossfire?"

"Don't worry about it. This kid can bring you back to life."

"No, no, no! Dying is absolutely unacceptable! Miss Kris, if you truly love me, please do not come over here!"

But now that she had shown her hand, she must have known the trick wouldn't work again.

Actually, Miss Rena is much more powerful than I realized...

Hanakawa had underestimated her quite a bit. She was good enough to keep Kris at a distance despite all the skills Kris had obtained.

“I wondered what was going on, but this looks like fun.”

Hanakawa jumped at the voice coming from behind him. There shouldn’t have been anyone there.

“Huh? Who are you?” Turning around, he saw a young man in a white coat.

“I kind of got lost. I didn’t know what to do, but then I heard you guys being noisy, so I came this way.”

“I see...”

“Oh, don’t mind me. I’m just here to watch.”

The boy sat down beside Hanakawa. Neither the women fighting nor the spectators seemed to notice his presence.

“I don’t know how I feel about that...” This mysterious kid had shown up out of nowhere. Hanakawa couldn’t let his guard down.

But the boy was totally at ease, wasting no time getting friendly with him. “Who do you think will win?”

“I imagine the winner will be Miss Rena. Miss Kris seems unable to fight back. She has already lost her sword, so her ability to steal skills is useless to her.”

Whenever she died, Kris came back to life, but it didn’t restore her equipment. Her sword had been vaporized, and her armor had been blown off, leaving her almost naked.

“That one is Kris, huh? Looks like she has about a thousand lives left.”

“You see? She had ten thousand at the beginning. If she has lost so many already, she is more or less finished.”

“No, Kris hasn’t gotten serious yet.”

“Even after being killed so many times?”

Rena’s beam of light suddenly shot off in a wild direction. Kris had deflected it with her hand.

“The Foundation Eater is starting to take over much faster. Do you think she’ll run out of lives before that happens?”

Kris still wasn’t able to avoid the beams of light. That deflection must have been a coincidence. But eventually, the beams stopped punching through her. Even though they struck her head on, they weren’t blowing her away like before.

She unleashed a bloodcurdling scream. Was that from the pain of Rena's attacks or her mind being corrupted? Her body began to transform. Her skin turned dark and solid. Something like wings began to grow from her back, and her fingers extended into razor sharp claws.

"Wait! What's going on?!" Confused, Rena continued firing her beams of light. One struck Kris directly in the face, but she was unharmed. At this point, Rena's attacks weren't hurting her in the least.

"I don't think a human will be able to beat her now."

"She has turned into an actual monster..."

"HaNaKaWa...WAiT...I'lL KiLl ThEm AlL...AnD gO...to YoU..."

"I thought perhaps she had lost her mind, but she definitely remembers me, doesn't she?!"

"Oh, so your name is Hanakawa? I'm Takumi. Nice to meet you."

At this point, Hanakawa could only pray that Yoshifumi's group would somehow prevail.

Chapter 17 — She Probably Would Have Been Fine If We'd Just Left Her Alone

Her transformation complete, Kris charged. Realizing that her beams weren't having any effect, Rena took a defensive stance. Kris swung her claws down, but Rena was already gone. She had teleported behind her, using her ability to appear behind the person she was fighting.

A swift kick delivered to the back of the head decapitated Kris, but that didn't stop her from spinning and slashing again. Rena jumped backwards, clicking her tongue. Kris's head had already regenerated.

"Is that because she still possesses remaining lives? It seems possible Miss Rena might still be able to win." Hanakawa tried to stay optimistic.

"No, she's in a completely different league now. She has the backup of a real Foundation Eater. If you want to talk about lives, she has four or five Celestial Foundations' worth. Or maybe it would be easier to understand if I said she had four or five universes? Trying to chew through all of them would take an astronomical amount of time." Takumi's explanation was very difficult to believe.

"That is totally off the scale! It defies the imagination!"

"That's Foundation Eaters for you. They eat entire universes in a single bite. It's not like they can use everything they eat, and it takes them some time to digest it all, but they'll generally have about four universes or so sitting in their gut at once."

"How did it come to this?!"

"Kris made a big mistake, stealing powers from a Foundation Eater's Terminal. Trying to take powers from a Terminal is like inviting in the Trojan Horse." Though Hanakawa had no memory of explaining the situation, Takumi seemed fully aware of Kris's abilities.

"'Trojan Horse,' huh? I suppose that is just a result of the translation..." Hanakawa mumbled under his breath. This world must have had a similar incident in its history, so the metaphor was translated to a familiar one for

him.

“I’ve been speaking Japanese this whole time, you know. You’re Japanese, right? I used to be Japanese too.”

“I thought you looked somewhat Japanese. Is that why you also possess a Japanese sounding name?”

“Yeah. Though I forgot my last name.”

“Speaking of which, what business brings you here, Sir Takumi?”

The mysterious boy had suddenly shown up out of nowhere, sat down beside Hanakawa, and started to explain the fight. It wouldn’t have been strange for Hanakawa to be on guard against him, but for some reason he didn’t feel that concerned.

“I’m looking for something. I thought it was around here, so I’ve been wandering around, and I ended up getting lost, but I finally found it.”

“What exactly is it?”

“That guy over there is holding it. But man, he’s got some style, doesn’t he? Where did he find clothes like that? Were they custom-made?” Takumi was pointing at Yoshifumi.

“I see. However, if it is a possession of Sir Yoshifumi, I imagine it may be quite a challenge to get it from him.”

If you asked the Sage to hand something over, he’d probably kill you on the spot. If you wanted something from him, you’d need a clever way of negotiating.

“Well, it’s not like I need it right away. For now, let’s just watch the girls fight.”

Rena still seemed to have the advantage. She could continuously teleport behind Kris and attack. Since she could only teleport directly behind her, Kris knew the attacks could only come from either the front or back, leaving her to guess which direction the next blow would come from. If her response was even slightly late, Rena would take the chance to strike.

But it soon became evident that this wouldn’t last for long. Kris grew another face on the back of her head.

“I thought she wasn’t totally outside the realm of possibility before, but now she is definitely a complete monster!”

“You’re pretty tolerant, aren’t you?”

“I do not mind an alien monster woman that much.”

“It’s still a fight for now, but it’s just a matter of time.”

“If what you said earlier is true, I can imagine no other conclusion. If she can resurrect herself indefinitely, Miss Rena has no chance.”

“A Terminal isn’t especially powerful, but I guess it’s a lot more than a human can handle.”

Kris continued to transform. When she needed more arms, she grew them. When she needed mobility, she grew legs. Each time she took damage, her skin hardened. It soon became clear that Rena could no longer fight her.

Kris finally landed a solid blow. Rena was just able to block it, but the impact sent her flying, tumbling at Yoshifumi’s feet.

“I guess that’s it for you, huh?” Yoshifumi said, looking down at her.

“Yeah, sorry. Looks like that’s the best I can do,” Rena answered bitterly, knowing full well she no longer had a chance.

“HaNaKaWa...SoOn...” Kris looked at Hanakawa with the multitude of faces on her chest and stomach.

“After all that, why are you still thinking about me?!”

“Oh, does she like you or something?” Takumi asked.

“I suppose that is not entirely false, but her intention appears to be to eat me! Of course, I have no intention of indulging her!”

“Oh. Want some help, then?”

“Huh? Is there something you can do?”

“Yeah, I think I can handle her.”

“That makes me curious, who exactly are you? Appearing out of nowhere, explaining everything, and then offering to help me? It sounds too good to be true.” In spite of the fact that he felt relaxed around him, Hanakawa still had no idea who Takumi was.

“Just call it a favor for a fellow Japanese guy. No need to be so suspicious.”

“Well, it is not like there is anything I am capable of accomplishing at this point, so if you have the ability to provide assistance I am more than happy to receive it. But this won’t lead to me getting wrapped up in something terrible later, will it?” Considering his experiences so far, Hanakawa was skeptical.

“Nope. This is just a whim. You don’t look like you’d be fun to fight anyway.”

Takumi stood up. He stepped past Yoshifumi and the two girls to stand in front of Kris, then casually reached forward and grabbed her by the neck. His movements were so smooth and natural, Kris had no chance to respond.

“The hell are you?! Where’d you come from?!” the emperor shouted in surprise as he suddenly noticed Takumi.

“I’m Takumi. You’re Yoshifumi, I guess?”

“Just who the hell are you? What’re you gonna do to her?”

Kris was using her numerous arms to punch at Takumi. Her claws slashed at him, and her multiple sets of jaws bit at him, but Takumi ignored it all. The arm he used to hold her didn’t so much as shake. Kris continued to transform, creating more arms, jaws, and blades to rip him apart, but nothing worked.

“We’re on completely different levels,” Takumi said, turning back to Kris. “It’s sad, but no matter how strong you get, you’ll never match me.”

There were no longer any vestiges of Kris’s humanity remaining. She was no more than a monster of countless arms and jaws. She even began to exude a toxic miasma.

“You guys have no way of dealing with her, right? Then let me offer a suggestion. Can you hand over the fragment of the goddess you’re holding? If you do, I’ll deal with her for you.”

“What?! How the hell do you know about that?!” Yoshifumi shouted.

“The seal was broken, so we can tell where they are now. Didn’t you notice?”

“You bastard. You’re an Aggressor?!”

“Who knows? I guess I could be? What do you say?”

“There’s no way I’d hand it over! What are you, stupid?!”

“Huh. Well, I tried. You don’t look fun to fight, so I thought I’d try to negotiate with you...but whatever. I said I’d help Hanakawa. Let’s get rid of her, then.”

The boy began to shine. The light cast out the darkness from the corridor, creating a world of pure white. Hanakawa covered his eyes, writhing about on the ground as the intense light burned his eyes. The brightness lasted for only a moment, so after casting Heal on himself, he opened his eyes again to find that almost nothing had changed. Takumi was still standing there, but Kris was gone. It was immediately obvious that the boy had erased her.

“Okay, you’re next. If you won’t hand it over, I have no choice but to take it from you by force. Do you feel like changing your mind?” he asked the Sage with a relaxed expression.

“Give it up, moron! You think that’s impressive?! Bring it on!” Yoshifumi answered with a small attempt at intimidation himself.

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The baby continued to babble, stretching its hand out. Yogiri, Tomochika, and Mokomoko continued walking through the ruins, following the direction the infant was indicating.

“She’s definitely trying to take us somewhere,” said Tomochika.

“It seems like she’s pointing down a little. Does she want us to go underground?” Yogiri asked.

“This is getting stranger and stranger...”

They walked through the scar in the earth, the mysterious ships now scattered all around them.

“Things have really gone nuts here, haven’t they?” Tomochika commented.

“Not that I think I did anything wrong.”

“I don’t know. Sure, it’s their fault for attacking you, but...”

After walking for a while, they came across a hole in the melted earth. As they approached it, the baby clearly indicated that it wanted to go down. As Yogiri had guessed, whatever she wanted was underground.

“Looks pretty deep,” he observed. “I can’t see the bottom.”

“How do we get down there?”

“If only we still had Furemaru,” Mokomoko sighed.

Yogiri looked around. It didn’t seem like there was anything useful for descending into the pit. “I guess we’ll give up.”

“That was fast!”

“We can’t jump down into a pit we can’t even see the bottom of, can we?”

“Waaaaaaaah!”

As Yogiri moved to step away, the baby began to wail.

“See? She wants to go down.”

“What am I supposed to do about it?”

They had a rope in their backpack, but there was nothing nearby to fasten it to. He could always kill gravity to get to the bottom safely, but it didn’t seem like a situation that called for such drastic action.

“Come on, try and understand,” Yogiri said to the baby. “We can’t go any farther.”

“Waaaaaaaaaah!”

The baby's earsplitting cry left him dumbfounded. No amount of rocking or cuddling seemed to soothe her.

"Okay, fine! We'll go! Please stop crying!"

The moment Yogiri said that, the baby grew silent.

"You know, I really don't like people who think they'll get whatever they want if they cry."

"Takatou...you realize she's just a baby, right?"

"But still, how do we get down there?" They looked at the hole again, but they could only see darkness. "If she wants to go that badly, why don't we send her by herself?"

The baby immediately blurted out a sound of disbelief.

"It seems like she understands us just fine," Yogiri added.

"Well, there's no way she's just a baby, right?"

"Hey, if you want to go down there so bad, tell us how," Yogiri instructed the child.

"Takatou, what are you expecting will..." As Tomochika spoke, they started floating up into the air. All three of them were now hovering a little ways off the ground. "Huh? What's going on?"

"ESP? Does she possess the power of levitation?" Mokomoko mused.

"If you can do this, why did you wait so long?" Yogiri complained.

"You're being pretty harsh on a baby!"

"I don't believe in treating people like children."

"Can you at least treat *babies* like children?!"

The three of them slowly hovered over to the hole, passed through it, and began to descend. After a while, they reached the bottom.

"It's so dark. Can you make some light for us?" Yogiri asked.

The baby babbled some more.

"It feels like she's saying, 'How would I?!'" Tomochika guessed.

"Fine. I think we have something."

Yogiri looked through the backpack. He pulled out a lantern and lit it with a match. Dull light filled the room. The floor was made of stone and lined with large pillars. It looked like classic underground ruins.

"Okay, can you make this float? You can do that much, right?"

The lantern began to hover in the air.

"You're being awfully demanding of this baby, you know."

The infant reached forward, indicating the direction she wanted to go. As

they walked, the lantern hovered along with them.

"If she can do all this, she probably would have been fine if we'd just left her alone, don't you think?"

The baby gave an indignant shout.

"I don't think she agrees, Takatou."

"Well, whatever. This way, right?"

Although they had no idea what she wanted, they followed the baby's directions deeper into the ruins.

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Chapter 18 — All the Slave Drivers Will Be Gone! I'll Finally Be Free!

"What on earth is going to happen now?!"

Hanakawa was happy enough to see Kris gone, but now Takumi and Yoshifumi were squaring off. Though it left him bewildered, it didn't take Hanakawa long to realize he didn't mind. If Takumi won, that would be one less slave driver in his life. The boy didn't seem to have much interest in him either, so that would mean he was finally free.

Hanakawa silently began to cheer for Takumi.

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Takumi could tell that the fragment of the goddess was within Yoshifumi's body. All he had to do was pull it out. It would be quite easy. The Sage looked like someone so weak that he couldn't tell how weak he was. Unable to recognize Takumi's strength, the emperor was a fool who could do nothing but talk big. If Takumi stopped suppressing his power even a little, his presence alone would overwhelm Yoshifumi. Fighting him seriously wasn't even worth considering, but given how confident Yoshifumi was acting, Takumi was a little curious to see what he'd do.

"What's wrong? Not gonna use that light again? Just try it!"

"The problem is, if I attack, it'll all be over. Wouldn't it be better for you to start? I don't mind ending it if you don't want to do anything, though."

"Heh! Is that so?! I'll make you regret it!" A knife appeared in Yoshifumi's hand. "Yah!"

He hurled the knife at the boy, but his form was terrible. Takumi couldn't tell what he was trying to do. Maybe this was the Sage trying his best, but the attack was so slow that it would be easy to step out of the way, and even if it landed, it wouldn't hurt at all.

Well, maybe I'll just let him hit me.

But Takumi's consideration was all for nothing. The blade disappeared before reaching him.

"Oh?" Takumi was impressed at the unexpected development. Would the knife reappear and strike at him from his blind spot? He waited patiently to find out. He couldn't imagine the attack would hurt him, but he was looking forward to seeing if it would surprise him when it reappeared.

Yet, no matter how long he waited, the knife never returned.

Did he teleport it directly inside me? Doesn't feel like it.

Curious, he did a serious check of his surroundings, but the knife wasn't anywhere to be found. It wasn't even in the subspace connected to the area around them.

"So? What did you do?" Takumi was disappointed. He'd liked the part where it disappeared, but if nothing happened after that, it was hardly interesting.

"I guaranteed your defeat!" Yoshifumi stepped closer, an arrogant expression on his face.

"How's that?"

"Now die!" Once Yoshifumi came within arm's reach, he threw an exaggerated punch.

"If you've got nothing, I'll just finish this," Takumi sighed.

Yoshifumi's fist touched Takumi's face. He decided to raise his defense a little. That would be the end. Just making contact with Yoshifumi would erase the Sage altogether.

Instead, the punch sent Takumi stumbling backwards. The unexpected pain dropped him to the ground in confusion.

"What?" he blurted out.

"Take that!"

Yoshifumi threw a kick so sloppy that it left him off balance. His foot struck Takumi in the solar plexus, doubling him over. Takumi's mind reeled as the wind was knocked out of him. He had no idea what was going on.

"You're weak as hell, aren't you?!" Yoshifumi stomped on the back of Takumi's head, pushing his face into the stone floor. Again and again he slammed his foot down, grinding Takumi's face into a bloody mess.

For a moment, Takumi felt like he had blacked out. This was impossible. Moaning in pain, struck hard enough to lose consciousness, he couldn't fight back at all.

“N-No way...”

“Oh, you finally said something. Good! Keep going! Keep talking like the idiot you are! Tell me how impossible this all is!”

What is going on? What’s happening?

Takumi finally responded, curling into a ball to protect his head from the repeated strikes. The aura that should have been protecting him wasn’t functioning. His magic wouldn’t work, and he couldn’t teleport. His summoning powers were failing. The power he had received from killing gods wasn’t working.

What is happening?! How is he doing this?!

He was at the end of his rope. It was all he could do to bear the attacks coming his way.

“How pathetic!” Yoshifumi sneered, stopping his attack. “After how full of yourself you were, this is all you got?!”

Takumi looked up at Yoshifumi in fear. He still couldn’t understand the situation he was in.

“Dying without realizing what’s goin’ on is boring, so I’ll explain it to ya!”

A sadistic smile rose to Yoshifumi’s face. There was no way he was explaining out of the kindness of his heart. Takumi could tell he was just doing it to make him despair all the more.

“This thing is called the Wandering Edge.” Yoshifumi played with a knife in his hands. It must have been the knife that had vanished into the air earlier. “It can travel into the past and change events.”

“But how... There’s no way something like that...”

“I’ve got it, so it obviously exists, idiot. Face it.”

Takumi couldn’t accept that. He had been transported to another world and given powers by a god, and then developed those powers enough to kill that god. Growing tired of his new world, he had traveled to others and killed their gods too, becoming known as a serial killer of gods. There was no way someone who had transcended even the gods could be defeated by an ordinary human, and such a pathetic looking one at that.

“You really were pretty strong, but there was a time you were pretty weak, you know. If I aim there, it’s all over. No matter how strong you are now, there’s no way you can stop it!”

“L-Like hell! You can’t—”

“Except I *can*! That’s why you’re crawlin’ in the dirt, suckin’ on rocks!”

Yoshifumi delivered another kick, catching Takumi right in the face and sending him flying. Blood poured from his nose, leaving him barely able to breathe.

“There you have it. If this thing killed you in the past, you wouldn’t have made it all the way here. That would’ve been easy enough but not very fun, right? So instead, I just killed the life experiences that got you all your powers.”

“That’s impossible! There’s no way...” But his confidence was gone. Had he actually killed gods? Had he really gained all that power? He wasn’t sure what was actually true anymore.

“In the end, as long as everything’s consistent, it’s fine. Whether you got some super strong powers and came here by yourself or dreamed it all up and walked in here thinkin’ you were a lot stronger than you were, it doesn’t change anything for me. This is the truth I’ve seen!”

“That’s not possible! You saw my power for yourself!”

“Did I? I feel like I did, but maybe that was all an illusion? I never got hit by you, after all.”

“B-But I...” Takumi had memories of obtaining power and killing gods. But being told it had all been a dream, he had no way to prove otherwise. In reality, he was totally powerless.

“That’s how it is. So let’s start again. The pathetic ordinary person you are versus the super strong me! Do your best!”

Unable to breathe properly, Takumi could barely rise to his feet. He couldn’t tell what was real and what had been a dream anymore. He couldn’t help but wish that this whole encounter was just a nightmare.

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It looked like any other street fight. It was exactly like a fight started with the excuse of bumping shoulders on the street, followed by a thug beating on someone who had never been in a fight before. Yoshifumi kicked and stomped on the fallen Takumi, who curled up into a ball. Hanakawa couldn’t imagine someone with the boy’s overwhelming strength losing, but that was what happened. Hanakawa had no idea what the Sage’s powers were.

After a while, Takumi stopped moving. He was likely dead. Hanakawa

didn't feel like his healing power would work in this case. Content that he had finished Takumi off, Yoshifumi walked over to Hanakawa.

"Hanakawa. You weren't sittin' there thinkin' how lucky you'd be if I died, were you? Were you?!"

"N-Not at all! I never thought such a thing! I was secretly cheering for you in my heart!"

"Oh? And here I thought you'd be thinkin' if I died, you'd be free."

"'All the slave drivers will be gone! I'll finally be free!' That's what I think was going through his mind," Rena said, apparently having recovered a bit.

"I forgot you had the ability to do that!"

"That's what I figured," Yoshifumi said, a pitying look in his eyes.

"B-But putting that aside! What on earth is your power?!"

"What? I never told you?"

"No. I never had the opportunity to ask."

"Well, it's not like it's a secret, and there's no point in hidin' it. My power's called Super Hero Time. Doesn't matter what they can do—once I'm in front of an enemy, I can beat 'em. A new power awakens or I get a new weapon."

"So...that is totally absurd, is it not?! There are plenty of cheat-like powers in this world, but that is literally cheating!"

"Doesn't seem like I can lose to anyone, does it?"

"That's why Yoshifumi doesn't care who his Four Heavenly Kings are, nor does he care if anyone betrays him," Rena said as she stood up.

"Hanakawa, heal Rena."

"Understood."

Hanakawa did as he was told. Her injuries were straightforward enough, so she recovered immediately.

"All right, then; let's get going." Yoshifumi turned to Vivian. "Where's that World Sword at?"

"Huh? Oh, th-that way!"

They began walking in the direction Vivian indicated.

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This is no good. There's nothing I can do...

Vivian had lost her nerve. She was in shock from the fight between Kris and Rena, terrified by the incredible power of the boy who had shown up and erased Kris, and had been dropped right into a pit of despair after seeing Yoshifumi completely overwhelm him. Vivian had had no idea the Sages were so strong.

His power was invincible. Just getting a little power from God wasn't nearly enough to beat him. She wasn't even sure if the World Sword would be enough. She had naively thought she could manage as long as she had it, but now she wasn't so sure. If he manifested a new power to defeat any foe he faced, there was no way to win. He was too strong. If the thought occurred to him, Yoshifumi could take over the world effortlessly. The fact that he had restricted himself to playing emperor over this island country in the middle of nowhere was a fantastic stroke of luck for everyone else.

But if he gets his hands on the World Sword too...

The thing she had thought was the World Sword was old and worn down. But someone had stolen it and run, so it might have been the real thing. If it could be repaired and returned to its true strength, could she afford to let Yoshifumi get his hands on it?

She couldn't do that. The already incredibly powerful Sage would become even stronger. She had done as she was told to save her own life, but she was starting to think it had been the worst possible choice. Even if it ended the hopes and dreams of her nation, it might have been better to keep the World Sword from his hands.

I should be able to do something...

All she had to do was run away or lie to him. She might die, but that was better than bringing about an even greater disaster. However, resolving oneself to death wasn't an easy feat. For the moment, she reluctantly did as she was told. There was always a chance that something miraculous would happen and everything would be resolved without her having to die. She could only hope for that virtually impossible miracle.

Vivian walked ahead of the others, leading them in the direction indicated by the Search Shield. She walked slowly through the stone corridors but fast enough that it wouldn't look unnatural. It probably didn't mean anything, but that was the only resistance she could offer.

"What is that?" Hanakawa suddenly asked.

He was pointing ahead. A dull light was hovering in the distance. A light

floating over his head illuminated the area around them, but it didn't reach that far. They didn't know what it was.

"Looks like it's moving. Is it coming this way?" Rena remarked. It did seem to be slowly drawing closer.

"For such remote ancient ruins, there sure seem to be an awfully large number of visitors," Hanakawa commented.

"What do we do?"

"What else? Just keep going." Yoshifumi wasn't the least bit concerned about the light.

Continuing on, they saw three figures. As they got closer, the figures became clearer until Vivian recognized who they were.

"Run away!" she screamed at them.

No matter what strange powers the trio had, they couldn't stand against Yoshifumi. If they met him, he would definitely kill them. They may have been enemies of God, but that didn't mean they deserved to die at the Sage's hands.

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Chapter 19 — If He's Not Here, Then Whatever

As Yogiri's group walked through the underground ruins, they saw a distant light.

"Is someone over there?"

"Looks like it."

The baby babbled again, reaching towards the light. That must have been the destination she had in mind. They could hardly go back after coming so far, so they kept going forward.

As they did, they came across a group with a few familiar faces. They immediately recognized Hanakawa and Vivian. Beside the pair were a man who looked like some kind of street thug and a woman who looked to be sulking over something or other.

"Run away!" Vivian shouted upon seeing them.

"Huh? Why?" Tomochika asked, confused. Neither she nor Yogiri had any idea what was wrong.

"This guy is the Sage and emperor, Yoshifumi! You can't beat him, so get out of here!"

If the seedy looking guy wearing a studded leather jacket was Yoshifumi, the other woman must have been one of his subordinates.

"Hanakawa, what's going on?" Yogiri asked their former classmate, who seemed to be working with the Sage as well.

"What?! You're talking to me in *this* situation?!"

"You know what the situation is, don't you?"

"Hanakawa, you know these guys?"

"Uhh...please allow me to explain to you both! First, this small fry-looking punk is the Sage and emperor of Ent, Sir Yoshifumi!"

"The hell? You want to die or somethin'?"

"You said I could say whatever I wanted, did you not?!"

"Are you still tryin' to play the jester?"

“Am I not the jester anymore?!”

“Well, whatever. I guess I never fired you.”

“And this unhealthy looking woman with the terrible outfit spoiling all her good looks is Miss Rena, one of Ent’s Four Heavenly Kings.”

“Good thing you tried that with Yoshifumi first or that would be enough for me to kill you,” Rena said.

“And those two over there! They are my classmates, Sir Yogiri Takatou and Tomochika Dannoura...and I don’t know who the third one is! I suppose they had a baby at some point!”

“Yogiri Takatou, huh? I feel like I’ve heard that name before. You’re the one who crushed Aoi, huh?” Yoshifumi glared at him. His expression was just like a common street thug’s.

“Did I? I’ve never heard the name. Are you talking about the guy in the canyon who was fighting that robot?”

“Canyon? You mean near Hanabusa?”

“Yeah, that one.”

“That would have been Santarou. So you killed him too, huh?”

“Did I? He never told me his name, so it’s hard to say.”

“So! What brings Sir Takatou to this place?” Hanakawa interjected. “Ah! It must be a picnic! There’s no way you’d come all the way here because you had some business with Sir Yoshifumi, right?”

“Why would we be on a picnic here? The baby seemed like it wanted us to come this way...though actually, if he’s a Sage, that’s perfect. We want your Philosopher’s Stone. Do you mind if we take it?”

“Whaaaat? What the hell do you think you’re saying, moron?!” Yoshifumi began to rile himself up, but he wasn’t all that scary. With his appearance, it was hard to actually be intimidating.

“Sir Yoshifumi! I recommend you do not consort with the likes of him! This Takatou fellow is the absolute worst! He can inflict instant death on anything and everything! He can also detect killing intent and use his power to counter it! He is totally invincible!”

“Hanakawa, whose side are you on here?” Tomochika asked.

“No one’s! I’m neutral! Neutral! I am a remora that sticks to whichever side lets me live!” Hanakawa turned defiant.

“Instant death, huh?” Yoshifumi muttered. “If he killed Santarou, then his power works on Sages too.”

“Speaking of which, the Philosopher’s Stones lose their power if the Sage dies, don’t they? That’s kind of a problem.” said Yogiri.

Killing Yoshifumi would be easy enough, but they couldn’t if they wanted the stone. That created a considerable obstacle for Yogiri.

I guess I’ll have to kill parts of him until he can’t move.

It would be the same way he had dealt with Raiza. This time, they didn’t have Furemaru so getting through his body might have been a challenge, but if they had anything with a blade, Mokomoko should be able to manage, so Yogiri was optimistic.

“So you can detect killing intent and inflict instant death... Not that it matters!”

A knife appeared in Yoshifumi’s hand.

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Yoshifumi didn’t feel threatened by Yogiri in the least. His Super Hero Time power wasn’t reacting to the newcomer. If it wasn’t giving him any new powers, that meant what he had now was sufficient to do the job.

Still, I guess I’ll be careful.

Yoshifumi manifested his Wandering Edge. It was his strongest weapon, capable of perfectly erasing his target. He could throw it into the past, making it so that his target never existed in the first place. He could change the past without killing them, but that was only one of its uses. This was revenge for another Sage, so he didn’t intend to play around this time.

Yoshifumi threw the knife. He had no intention of hitting Yogiri, so he had thrown it in a random direction. It disappeared in the air, flying into the past. Back to Yogiri’s past, when he was just a newborn baby, impaling his pathetic, defenseless self. If he did that, the Yogiri in front of him would disappear in an instant. The only one who would remember what had existed before he changed the past was Yoshifumi himself. No one else would believe he had existed in the first place.

A single person disappearing could create all sorts of paradoxes, but things would work out to be consistent in the end. The weapon had the ability to restore damaged space-time, so it could use other elements to make up for the hole it created.

But Yoshifumi immediately realized something was wrong. If he had

changed the past, things should have changed the instant he let go of the knife. That was obvious enough, but a few seconds after the knife had disappeared, Yogiri was still standing there. And no matter how long he waited, nothing was happening.

"What was that?" Yogiri asked, confused. He hadn't recognized it as an attack. So Yoshifumi wasn't dead. But that meant Yoshifumi had done nothing at all.

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Yoshifumi had thrown his knife, so Yogiri figured he intended on fighting, but he didn't feel any killing intent coming from him. So he waited to see what the Sage was doing, but nothing happened.

"What was that?" he asked, but no answer came. It appeared that whatever was going on was outside of Yoshifumi's expectations. Yet, if the fight had started, Yogiri decided he should probably start paralyzing his opponent.

He picked a target for his power. Killing individual parts of people wasn't the intended use of his ability, so it required a lot more concentration. But in the end, he didn't use his power at all. For some reason, a knife appeared, sticking out of Yoshifumi's chest.

"What?" It must have been the knife Yoshifumi had thrown, but it was sticking out of his own chest. He had no idea what Yoshifumi was trying to do.

"The Wandering Edge, is it? That is an awfully cowardly weapon." A strangely familiar woman suddenly appeared, standing beside Yoshifumi. She had ears like a fox and wore a loose yet elegant kimono.

"Oh, it's Miss Fox."

"Huh? You know her?" Tomochika asked, surprised.

"I played with her back when I was a kid."

"She's a youkai, isn't she?! Look at those ears!"

"Now that you mention it, I guess she's a youkai."

A fox youkai. Now that he thought about it, it must have been true. But it had been so long ago when they played together, his memories of her were rather vague. Thinking back on it now, it was pretty obvious, but he had never been conscious of it before.

"You fool. You total idiot. Aiming at him when he was a child was the

worst thing you could have done." The fox made no attempt to hide her disdain.

"What? What's goin' on? What hell is this?!" Yoshifumi shouted.

"Miss Fox," Yogiri called out to the new arrival.

"Oh! Look how big you are now! Have you been doing well?"

"Yeah, I'm doing fine, but why are you here?"

"Well, that person tried to attack you when you were a baby with the Wandering Edge. So I came here to counter it."

"How did you get here?"

"I just followed the blade's path."

"Can you bring me back with you?"

"No, I don't think so. The me you see is just a shadow. I'll be disappearing from here soon enough."

Yogiri had hoped that if she could make it here so easily, she could take him back with her, but things were never that convenient.

"Okay, then can you get the Philosopher's Stone out of that guy for me?"

"The stone? You mean this?" The fox casually punched a hand into Yoshifumi's chest. The Sage couldn't even react.

"Guh...you...bastard...stop..."

When she pulled her fist back, Yoshifumi collapsed to the ground. A round, transparent stone was now in her hand.

"Yeah, that's it. We need them to get home."

The fox handed him the stone. "Is that how it is? Well, try not to wander too far." With that, she faded away.

"We're not here because we *want* to be." Yogiri had no idea whether she had heard his reply. If she was just a shadow, there might have been no point in replying to her at all.

"Huh? So, what is going on with Sir Yoshifumi? I don't understand what just happened," Hanakawa complained, but it wasn't like Yogiri knew either.

"Yoshifumi!" Rena ran to the fallen Sage's side.

"Yogiri Takatou... You..." Vivian was in shock.

"Yeah, we got the Philosopher's Stone from Yoshifumi," Yogiri explained. "He's probably dead now."

Defeating the Sage had been Vivian's goal. Perhaps it was hard for her to accept that someone else had killed her target, but there was nothing he could do about it.

“You say it so plainly! What was all my suffering up until this point for?!” Hanakawa complained.

“Who cares about what you went through?” Yogiri replied. “On that note, stop just disappearing that way.”

“Huh? Were you perchance worried about me?”

“We left thinking, ‘If he’s not here, then whatever.’”

“Then please do not speak as if you have any concern for me!”

Yogiri looked at the stone in his hand. It was the same as all the others he had acquired so far. The baby on his chest began to squirm, trying to reach for it.

“Is this what you were looking for?”

More babbling.

“Sounds like it,” Tomochika said.

“What are you, a baby translator now?”

“I don’t know, I just sort of get what she wants.”

Though he wasn’t sure if it was okay to let her touch it, he ended up giving in. When the baby touched the stone, it stuck to her hand instantly. It then turned into flesh, fusing with her hand.

“So she really did come from the Philosopher’s Stones,” Yogiri commented. The baby absorbed the stone completely, leaving no trace of it behind. “Wait, you gained a lot more weight than was in that stone!”

The child in the sling suddenly became much heavier. It wasn’t so heavy that he couldn’t hold her, but it was a huge increase in weight. As they watched, she grew larger, and her hair grew down past her shoulders. In human terms, she looked to have grown to about three years old.

“Well, now you’re way too big for the sling...”

“Daddy...” The baby spoke clearly.

“‘Daddy’?”

As bothersome as caring for the baby had been before, Yogiri couldn’t help but feel like things had just gotten a lot worse.

Chapter 20 — Interlude: What Am I Supposed to Do with Freedom at This Point?

Shigeto looked down at Rei's body. Despite being beheaded, she wore a serene expression. The perfect surprise attack had taken her life before she knew anything was even happening. Although he felt like he should have loved her, he surprisingly felt nothing. She must have been using her power to manipulate his feelings after all.

Shigeto decided to make a grave for her. Even if he wasn't in love, she was still one of his classmates and a companion who had traveled with him for a long time. While he wasn't pleased about having been manipulated, he wasn't upset enough to leave her body to the elements.

Pulling out a shovel, he began to dig just outside of the cave. With his physical attributes enhanced by the Gift, it wasn't particularly strenuous work, and he finished in no time. With the burial complete, he returned to the cave to watch over the World Sword.

The mission that had been given to him was to wait there until the World Sword had been repaired. That likely included fighting off those who might come to steal it, but there were no signs of anyone else approaching the cave.

While he waited, he felt the Femme Fatale powers lose their grip on him. His feelings for the woman named Kris had vanished entirely.

"There's not much point in releasing me now. Maybe she died?" It was the same feeling he'd had when Rei had died—a feeling of calm, like he had finally become himself again. "Ha ha ha...what am I supposed to do with freedom at this point?"

Shigeto was at a loss. He had escaped the powers of the Femme Fatale, but there wasn't anything more for him to do. His friends were dead. His powers were gone. All he had left were physical abilities that were slightly better than an ordinary person's and the items that his Book of Prophecy had

led him to acquire. Some would consider that plenty of power, but for Shigeto, who had done nothing but follow the book's instructions until then, it felt like being thrown out into the cold. He had no idea how to survive with only minimal physical abilities and some random items.

"I suppose I'll just take the World Sword with me."

Although it seemed like a powerful weapon, he wasn't trained in swordsmanship and doubted that a well-made sword was enough to defeat the Sages. The Book of Prophecy had said it could, so it must have been possible somehow, but he had no knowledge of the details.

Still, it didn't sit well with him to abandon the weapon he had spent so long trying to obtain. He looked at the World Sword's cocoon. Within the sphere of water floating in the air, the sword inside was beginning to regain its original shape. With nothing else to do, he sat down and waited.

After some time, the sound of something clanging to the ground woke him up. The sphere of water hovering in the air had vanished, and the sword had dropped to the floor.

Shigeto took it in his hands. It was a double-edged blade, beautiful yet simple.

"It *does* feel like it could cut anything..."

Even though he didn't know how to use it, merely holding it inspired a deep desire for him to possess the weapon. He certainly didn't want to give it to anyone else.

"No scabbard, though?"

Carrying it around as a naked blade would be dangerous. Suddenly, a scabbard appeared around it.

"What was that?" he said, confused.

"You called?"

"Huh?"

Navi appeared at his side.

"What's going on? My prophecy powers were stolen, so you should be with that woman. Did she die and return the power to me or something?"

"No, the powers she steals aren't returned upon death," Navi replied.

"Then why are you here?"

"You're confused and want information, right? So the World Sword created me."

"I don't understand... Are you the Navi that I know?"

“Yes. I am your Navi. The World Sword searched the past and found that, as a being born from one of your skills, I was the best option to explain the situation.” Navi had a victorious smile on her face. “Now then. Let me tell you about the World Sword!”

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MY INSTANT DEATH ABILITY IS SO OVERPOWERED, NO ONE IN THIS OTHER WORLD STANDS A CHANCE AGAINST ME!

Side Story

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Shadows

In a certain prefecture in a certain city deep in the mountains, in a place that could be called an island in the wilderness, stood an unexpectedly modern facility: the Independent Higher Order Lifeform Research Institute.

“So, what do you want us to do?”

On the main floor in a corner of the facility, Asaka Takatou was speaking with her superior, Shiraishi, in one of the break rooms.

“My apologies, but it looks like rebuilding the underground village will be quite difficult,” he replied with a half-smile, although it didn’t feel like he was really apologizing.

“We can stay here for now, but not forever, right?”

Asaka, Yogiri, and Nikori had been moved to a meeting room on the surface. Some sort of curse had tainted the underground village, turning it into a place where people could no longer linger.

“Well, letting AΩ roam free here with no decent security is a huge issue.”

“He seems to be enjoying himself for now.”

It was an empty meeting room, it was all new to the boy. He didn’t seem the least bit unhappy about it. But how long would it take before he grew sick of it? It wouldn’t be a surprise if he started wandering about the facility or took an interest in the outside world.

“I don’t know. There are some rooms underground for those cooperating with us, so that would solve most of the security issues.”

“You mean the isolation cells?”

Shiraishi must have been speaking about the place where Estelle, the woman with the self-proclaimed power of being the most beautiful person in the world, was staying. But those people were treated like lab rats, so it didn’t give a great impression.

“It’s not like you’d be trapped there,” Shiraishi said.

“I guess Estelle comes and goes freely enough. But I can’t imagine the security is all that great.”

“It’s better than here on the surface. You need special clearance to get into

the underground floors of the facility."

"That didn't stop all those weird people from warping or teleporting or whatever down there, did it?"

"Uhh...let's put aside the issue of supernatural beings for now."

Both the self-proclaimed angels and the King of the World had made it into the underground village, and there was also the case of that bizarre world connecting to it, so it was hard to call the place safe. But if one considered those things rare exceptions, being far enough underground did offer a degree of security.

"To be frank," Shiraishi continued, "no matter how well-behaved AΩ is, letting him go free isn't an option. You do realize that, right, Miss Takatou?"

"I don't know. Yogiri has grown to be quite discerning. Don't you think there's something we can do?"

"Miss Takatou, please remember, our main purpose here is to seal away and isolate AΩ."

"But there's no real point to that, is there?"

If Yogiri wanted to, he could end the world no matter where he was. Asaka didn't see the point of keeping him underground in the first place.

"It all comes down to AΩ's whims. That's why the higher-ups want to avoid him meeting other people as much as possible."

Yogiri could kill anyone he didn't like, but that wasn't the greatest danger. The higher-ups were worried that he could turn against humanity itself.

"I don't know who these higher-ups are, but it sounds like they're afraid Yogiri wouldn't take too kindly to them if they ever met."

The people in question must have assumed that since they had evil thoughts themselves, others would be just like them.

"Ha ha ha...well, maybe they're afraid of AΩ so much *because* they are self-aware enough to recognize their pride in treating people like animals. At any rate, him needing to remain underground isn't a problem I can solve on my own."

"They must trust me an awful lot, then. There's always the possibility that he'll hate all of humanity because of me, isn't there?"

"They did a thorough investigation of you when you applied, of course."

"What?! What kind of investigation?!"

"They looked into a lot of things to make sure you weren't a spy for

another organization. Maybe you'd rather not hear all the details."

They must have investigated her to make sure she wouldn't be a danger to them, to ensure they could safely leave AΩ in her care. It wasn't hard to imagine how detailed the investigation had been.

"All right, that's enough scary talk. What am I supposed to do with Yogiri?"

"Realistically, we'll have to send him back underground eventually, but...for now, leaving him where he is should be fine. It will take some time to prepare a room for him down there anyway."

As if to say that was the end of their conversation, Shiraishi got up and left the break room.

Asaka returned to the meeting room. It held a large desk, a white board, and a projector, just like any meeting room would.

"This is what the IT battlefield looks like in the business world, huh?"

Though perhaps the futons on the ground, the dog sleeping in the corner, and the elementary-school-aged boy doing homework weren't all that normal for such a setting.

"Welcome back, Asaka!" Yogiri said, looking up as he noticed her arrival.

"Thanks." She sat down in one of the chairs.

"I finished my homework!"

"Oh? Let's see."

She looked over his answers. He had gotten them all correct. Though they were problems aimed at elementary school students, they were designed to make a challenging middle school entrance test. Some of the problems would even take adults by surprise if they weren't well-prepared.

"I guess there's no problem with your elementary level education..."

That didn't mean sending him to elementary school was out of the question, though. Yogiri was lacking in common sense. He had never even bought something from a store before. The kind of knowledge a person naturally acquired as they grew up was missing for him, and as long as he stayed locked up in the facility, he would have no way of growing. There were only so many things they could predict he would need to know.

It would be far better to learn in a more practical way, Asaka thought. Going outside, trying lots of things, and learning from his own failures. She couldn't think of a better way of teaching him. *But the people here don't want that...*

That's where Asaka diverged from them. The Institute only wanted to raise him so that they could make use of him in an emergency, but she saw him as a human being. She wanted him to be independent someday.

"Hmm. If he wanted to leave, he could at any time, but..."

If he threatened to kill anyone who stopped him, he could get outside easily. He could even guarantee a certain standard of living once he left. But that would turn him into nothing more than a supernatural being who terrorized others as a matter of course. That was hardly human. There was no better word to describe such a person than "monster."

"What's wrong?" Yogiri asked, seeing her deep in thought.

"Nothing. It looks like they won't be able to fix the village anytime soon, but they don't want us staying here forever either. So I was wondering where we'd go."

"Oh, I see."

"But it's nothing you need to worry about. They won't kick us out anytime soon."

"Okay, then. Let's play something." Yogiri seemed entirely unconcerned.

"Okay...ah, we do have that projector. Why don't we try using it for some video games!"

Pulling down a screen from the ceiling, they connected the game console to the projector, then turned off the lights to better see the screen.

"Ohh! That looks really impressive! I was asking for a home theater, but if we could get some good sound here, it would be almost perf— Huh?"

"What is it?" asked Yogiri.

"I thought I saw someone in the hallway."

The walls of the meeting room facing the hallway were covered in windows. They had lowered the blinds to block the view, but the gaps in the blinds were enough to see people walking by.

"Guess it was just my imagination. It's too dark to see anything anyway."

It wouldn't take long for her to realize it hadn't been her imagination at all.

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All matters involving AΩ were considered absolutely top secret at the Institute. So the fact that Yogiri was staying in the meeting room on the

surface was also kept a secret. But there was no way to keep people from talking. Even without being told explicitly, everyone knew not to approach that part of the facility. So no one came by the room they were staying in.

Yet even so, Asaka and Yogiri occasionally noticed someone outside the windows. And those figures were starting to appear with increasing frequency. A week had passed since they had moved to the surface, and at this point, when night fell, there was almost always something in the hall.

"Okay, there's definitely someone there! Are those the things from the village?!"

Having awoken during the night, Asaka noticed them. In the underground village, shadows had always appeared at night. If she closed the doors and windows of the mansion, they wouldn't come inside, so after a while she had grown used to the strange apparitions, even though she didn't know anything about them.

I thought they were ghosts tied to the location, but... But if they were showing up here, perhaps the shadows appeared wherever Yogiri was. *Well, as long as they don't come in here!*

While it was unpleasant to know they were in the building, the creatures weren't coming into the meeting room. Deciding that was good enough, Asaka went back to sleep.

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"You're pretty bold to go back to sleep in that situation..."

"Well, I was scared of them at first when we were underground. But they never come inside, right? So you get used to them after a while."

"That's what I'm saying is bold."

Shiraishi and Asaka were talking in the break room again. Asaka was reporting the strange happenings of late.

"The shadows have definitely been having an influence. There have been a number of sightings among the staff as well," her supervisor noted.

"Oh, did someone get attacked?"

"There haven't been any victims yet. At most, people have noticed vague figures in the distance or on the edges of their vision."

"Even so, can you guys work with that kind of stuff happening around you?"

These things weren't figments of the imagination, but actual beings. Even if they hadn't hurt anyone yet, she couldn't deny they were unsettling.

"I suppose since they only show up at night, if everyone finishes their work on time and goes home, they won't be bothered by them."

"Oh, so the employees are actually better off then. What are they anyway?"

"I have no idea. You said they always showed up in the underground village, right?"

"If you're asking me, then that must mean you don't know much about the situation down there."

"I only know what's in the reports."

"They try to get inside the house, but they never force their way in, so maybe they're not that strong."

"I'm not sure about that. There are plenty of stories of monsters that can't enter a dwelling without being invited in."

"So what do we do?" Asaka asked.

"It's definitely related to AΩ in some way... But what, indeed?"

"Well, I certainly don't know."

"For now, we'll start by contacting the family."

Though it sounded pretty fake to Asaka, there was a specific family who was responsible for putting up the barriers and constructing the underground village where they lived—the people who used to call Yogiri Lord Okakushi.

"So...wait and see, then?"

"I guess so."

With their conversation over, Asaka got some food and headed back to the meeting room. It was almost sunset. Once it was dark, those things would appear again; it was only a matter of time. Being indoors made no difference. Even if they filled the hallway with light, the shadows would appear.

"I'm back."

"Welcome back!" Yogiri greeted her.

They couldn't do much cooking in the meeting room, so it was all instant food for them. At least they could manage boiling the water and pouring it into something.

"Do you know what those things outside are, Yogiri?" Asaka asked as they ate their Cup Noodles.

"No idea. They've always been there."

“I feel like things are escalating somehow...”

Though she had grown used to seeing them underground, she couldn’t see them all outside when they appeared, so she didn’t know for sure. But it felt like there were more of them appearing here than before.

After finishing their meal, Asaka opened the blinds.

“Whoa!”

She was taken by surprise by the impossible sight. Countless shadows stood in the hallway. The lights were supposed to be on, but the sheer number of the things made the hallway look dark.

“Uhh, that’s a lot of ghosts. Are they playing a game or something? Actually, I don’t even know if they’re ghosts.”

“Wow, there really are a lot of them,” Yogiri commented as he came up by her side. He didn’t seem the least bit scared, just curious.

“What should we do about it? It doesn’t look like they’re doing much... Oh!”

Shiraishi had said that if the staff went home on time, there wouldn’t be any issues. But what about the security guards? Any building like this would have security guards—for a facility full of secrets that couldn’t be let out into the world, there would obviously be some on duty.

“Then again, the Institute has robots that look indistinguishable from humans, so maybe they’ve automated the security system.”

That being said, even the possibility of people being wrapped up in this seemed dangerous to her.

Asaka put an ear to the glass. Though the meeting room was mostly soundproof, she wanted to see if she could hear anything.

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She thought she could hear someone screaming.

“Yogiri, do you think we’d be safe if we went outside?”

“Yeah. I’ll protect you!”

“Oh...that actually makes me worry for the sake of the shadow people for some reason... But okay. I’m afraid if someone’s out there they might be in trouble, so I want to go take a look.”

“Okay!”

Asaka and Yogiri headed for the door. Resolving herself, Asaka pulled it open. The shadows didn’t rush towards her as she had feared. If anything, it felt more like they had pulled away.

This time, she heard the scream clearly. It definitely wasn’t her imagination.

“Let’s go.”

They stepped out into the hallway. The shadows didn’t try to approach. Heading for the source of the scream, they found a man wearing a security guard uniform huddled in the corner, trembling.

“Are you okay?” Asaka asked.

“Gaaaaaah! Huh?” The man blinked in surprise, caught off guard by the sight of other people. “Uh, you, y-you’re human, right?”

“Yes. We heard you screaming, so we came over. Do you know what’s going on?”

“I have no clue...”

“Of course not. Is there anyone else here?”

“I’m the only one in this area. There should be two more in the guardroom.”

“Let’s go see how they’re doing. Come with us.”

As they walked to the guardroom, the shadows kept their distance. As they moved through the building, the shadows moved to clear a path for them.

“What are these things...?” The guard asked, but Asaka had no answer for him.

As she was considering what to do about the situation, they heard a loud boom in the distance.

“Huh? What was that? An explosion?”

“It sounded like it came from the entrance,” the guard said. He was much more familiar with the building, so he was probably right.

“I guess we can’t just ignore it...”

The three of them headed to the entrance. The room, furnished with nothing but a reception desk and a small meeting corner, was filled with scattered rubble. The glass door leading out of the building had been smashed, and the most likely culprit was standing outside.

“Huh? What is that, some sort of cosplay?” Asaka wondered out loud.

A boy who looked to be about high school age stood outside in a military uniform. Large black wings protruded from his back.

“Aha ha ha ha ha! Darkness, death, and gods! I love it! Eating all these souls is going to drive me crazy!” He was laughing. He seemed so excited that he hadn’t noticed Asaka’s group yet.

“Is he some kind of terrorist? Dammit! I always wondered what we would do if someone targeted us here...” the security guard grumbled as if regretting his assignment.

“I guess so. I don’t know what research they’re doing here, but an attack on a facility creating a biohazard that kills all the guards is a pretty common plot, isn’t it?”

“Oh? Humans?” The young man finally noticed them as they whispered amongst themselves. “Normally I would not waste my time with the likes of you...but rejoice! You shall be directly consumed by me as I rise to godhood!”

Foreseeing exactly what was about to happen, Asaka tried to warn him. “Uh, I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

“Hah. Who would want to eat an old hag like you anyway?”

“What?!” She glared at him.

“All I am interested in consuming is that kid—”

That was as far as he got before he dropped to the ground, never to move again.

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As they waited outside the facility, Shiraishi came running over.

“I’m glad you got here so soon. I guess you went home on time as well?” Asaka asked.

“Workplace regulations are quite strict these days.”

“Even an evil organization goes through workplace reform?”

“Putting aside the morality of what we do here, not even we can avoid changing with the times.”

“So, what exactly is going on?”

“According to the family, the shadows may be the remains of divine spirits.”

“Divine spirits?”

“I don’t know much about them. But things like gods and youkai are normally immortal.”

“I see.” Asaka felt that didn’t explain anything at all. It was so far removed from her daily life that she found it hard to care.

“Even if they die or are destroyed, they eventually come back,” Shiraishi continued. “But as that happens over and over, it wears down their souls until they begin to forget who they even are. In the end, all they want is death. They want to disappear once and for all. That’s what I heard.”

“Huh? Then they’re...”

“That’s right. They’re here hoping someone will kill them. Of course, it’s not like we can actually ask them, so this is just conjecture.”

“Why do they only come out at night? And why don’t they come inside?”

“Who knows? As I said, I don’t know that much about them. I’m not that well versed in the occult.”

“I guess not. So what about that guy with wings?”

“He was a youkai...I guess?”

“Youkai? Well, I guess there was that King of the World fellow and the angels, so it’s not that far-fetched. It sounded like he was trying to absorb something that had collected around here.”

“If people like this are going to appear where AΩ is, we can’t have him in a place where there is no spiritual protection at all.”

“You realize the ‘spiritual protection’ underground didn’t do anything either, right?”

“It’s still better than being on the surface,” Shiraishi insisted.

“I guess so. Can you bring those barriers up to the surface, then?”

“That would take quite some time. It wouldn’t be easy...” Shiraishi trailed off. He really seemed to want them to stay underground.

“I can kill the shadow people though, can’t I?” Yogiri asked brightly.

“Huh? Uhh...” Asaka hesitated. The creatures didn’t even seem like living things, so it was hard to say whether they were alive or not in the first place.

“I guess...if they want to die, it’s okay? Maybe there’s no point, but should we try asking?”

“Okay.” Yogiri stepped into the facility. As he did, shadows immediately filled the area around him. They were definitely trying to follow him. “Anyone who wants to die, go over there.”

He pointed to his right. As he did, the shadows moved as one, going exactly where he was indicating. As Asaka and Shiraishi watched, dumbfounded, the shadows flowed forward, disappearing one by one until there were none left.

“It’s fine now, right, Asaka?”

“I guess so!” She wasn’t sure that was the case, but if they had chosen to disappear, she figured she didn’t have the right to complain.

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Afterword

Volume 8! As I said in the previous volume, this is a new record for me. Thank you so much! It seems like I'll keep setting new ones, so thank you for your continued support.

Also, as was written on the cover, this is the twentieth book I have written. It's been about six years since my debut. I feel like I don't write all that fast, but going for six years straight is pretty impressive, right?!

After eight volumes, however, I'm running out of things to put in the afterword. So let's take a look at the books I've already published!

Hobby Japan: HJ Bunko
My Sister Lives in a Fantasy World volumes 1 to 7

Earth Star Entertainment: Earth Star Novels
Unbeatable Demon Lord volumes 1 to 3
My Instant Death Ability is So Overpowered, No One in This Other World Stands a Chance Against Me! volumes 1 to 8
Harumi, the Mimic with Beautiful Legs — The Legend of the Rise of a Reborn Monster In Another World volume 1

Futabasha: M Novels
The God-Slaying Saint Who Needs No Second Strike ~ Waking Up After 5000 Years to Continue Her Legacy ~

That's about it.

By the way, my newest series is *The God-Slaying Saint Who Needs No Second Strike*, and will go on sale on January 30th. The artist is Eight Shimotsuki. The cover looks super cool!

"The enemies all die instantly! There are almost no battle scenes!" After writing so much like that, I wanted to try something where enemies get punched down normally. In that story, the main character is also almost all-

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powerful, so if that's the kind of story you like, please give it a try. My books all have the same kind of style, so if you like this one, I think you'll like that too.

The book will also be written as a manga by Shinichirou Takada. The manga is extremely fun, so please check it out as well.

In addition, Hanamaru Nanto's manga *My Instant Death Ability is So Overpowered, No One in This Other World Stands a Chance Against Me! ―AΩ―* is still in production! The first three volumes, covering volume 1 of the novels, are currently on sale. Volume 4 of the manga, which begins covering the material from volume 2 of the novels, should go on sale in the spring. Please give it a read!

This volume will also include the bonus short story, the Question Corner. I'm always accepting submissions for it, so please feel free to send them in at any time. I don't have that many submissions at the moment, so anything that isn't too hard to answer or indecent will probably get used! You can send submissions through Twitter, Shosetsuka ni Naro, or by mail.

There's no real format, so as long as it's clear that it's for the question corner, you should be all right.

Finally, my thanks.

For my supervising editor. I'm sorry that things overlapped with your end-of-year preparations. Thank you as always for your work.

For the illustrator, Chisato Naruse. Thank you as always for the wonderful illustrations. I'm sorry I cut things so close to the deadline this time. I will try my best to give you more time to work on the next one!

Next is volume 9! Thank you for your continued support!

Tsuyoshi Fujitaka
藤孝 剛志

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Hello, this is the illustrator, Chisato Naruse.
I was happy to see Tomochika and everyone being energetic and happy in volume 8.

Since I began working on this novel, I've been thrilled to hear many people say how much they like Tomochika. Tomochii is super popular! (Of course, never mind heroines, there aren't all that many friendly characters that stick around...)

I look forward to drawing everyone again in Volume 9!

CHISATO NARUSE

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Bonus Short Story

Question Corner 3

Tomochika: Okay, hello! I'm Tomochika Dannoura! This is our third Question Corner. We've managed to keep going this far, so I guess we'll probably be continuing for a while! As the name suggests, this part is for readers to send in their questions for us to answer!
Mokomoko: *Indeed. We would only be too happy to receive as many questions as possible! If we do not, I will have to begin writing questions for us again!*
Tomochika: I don't think we need to drag it out *that* long! Anyway, on to the questions!

Q: Good evening, Tomo! I like smooth cheesecake the best. Is it true that idiots can't catch colds?

Mero

Tomochika: My favorite cheesecake is... Wait, they didn't ask us about cheesecake at all, did they?!
Yogiri: I don't think so.
Mokomoko: *They most certainly did not.*
Tomochika: Anyway, I like cheesecake tarts the best! Being able to enjoy something soft and crispy at the same time is great!
Yogiri: You just wanted to share that, didn't you?
Tomochika: Is it true that idiots can't get colds? Why did they want to ask me that? You catch a cold when you catch a cold, right?
Mokomoko: *It is also used to refer to people being so foolish as not to recognize that they have caught a cold.*
Yogiri: I like cheesecakes where the whole thing is soft. I feel like your favorite kind would be kind of hard to eat.
Tomochika: You bring that up now?!

Yogiri: I just wanted to share.

Q: Happy Halloween, everyone! My first love was a girl in my class with huge boobs. Was Tomochika your first love, Takatou? You have been protecting her this whole time, but if Ryouko or Carol had bigger breasts, would you switch to one of them?

YOH.H

Tomochika: I don't think this is a question that should be asked around me!
Yogiri: Exactly what she said.
Mokomoko: *Indeed. A Question Corner is built on the premise of the same members answering the questions each time!*

Q: Yogiri, I know you want to return to Earth, but it seems no one on Earth actually wants you to return at all. How do you feel about that?

michishirube

Yogiri: I understand how they feel, but I'm also from Earth, so regardless of what anyone else wants, I kind of have to go back.
Tomochika: Well...I guess you can't really sympathize with them all that much, can you?
Yogiri: There seem to be plenty of people who think me being around is a problem, but I don't really care about their feelings.

Q: Hello, Asaka. Yogiri is doing his best in another world. He seems to be overdoing it to the point where humanity might be in danger, but I think it's all the gods' faults, so I don't think that matters. I have a question for you, since you know Yogiri so well. Does he ever get sick or catch a cold? Also, I'd like to know how many people he has killed on Earth. Why do I want to know? Well, it's not like I'm planning to beat him by giving him a cold. Really. I promise.

Bacon

Tomochika: Well, this is a question for Asaka, so what do we do?
Asaka: Oh, hello.
Tomochika: It's that easy?! Wait, are you allowed to be out here?!

Yogiri: Oh, hi, Asaka.
Tomochika: You're taking this awfully lightly as well! Are you sure this is okay?!
Mokomoko: *Indeed. All you must do is treat this as a dream being had by those of us in another world!*
Asaka: So what I'm doing during the events of the main story is still a secret.
Tomochika: Is...that really enough? Anyway, they asked if he's ever caught a cold. What do you think?
Asaka: No, he never has.
Tomochika: That's what I thought.
Yogiri: Germs and viruses die automatically when they get near me.
Mokomoko: *Hmm...perhaps you would actually be well-suited to becoming a doctor someday.*
Tomochika: And that's all the time we have for today! We're always taking questions, so feel free to send some in at any time!

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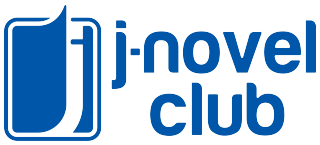

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My Instant Death Ability Is So Overpowered, No One in This Other World Stands a Chance Against Me! Volume 8
by Tsuyoshi Fujitaka

Translated by Nathan Macklem
Edited by Tess Nanavati

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